NATION

SC to hear Unnao rape case today

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BUSINESS

FPIs pull out record Rs 1.6L cr from Indian equities in 2025

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SPORTS

Humpy in joint lead at Doha World Chess C'ship

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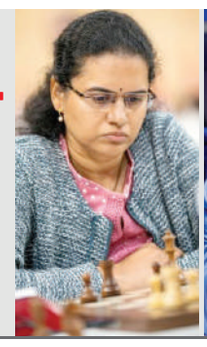

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SALAR

DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

روزنامہ ساہ بنگلور

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Malaria will be gone as cases 97% less: Shah

AHMEDABAD, 28 DEC

India has recorded a 97 per cent reduction in malaria cases, and the country will be free of the disease "shortly," Union Home Minister Amit Shah said. He was addressing the 'All India Medical Conference — IMA NATCON 2025' of the Indian Medical Association (IMA) here on Sunday. "Thanks to various healthcare-related schemes like Ayushman Bharat and Mission Indradhanush, we have recorded a 97 per cent reduction in malaria cases, and we will be almost free from malaria soon. The government has been able to bring down the dengue mortality rate to just one per cent. There is a 25 per cent reduction in maternal mortality," he said. *— PTI*

No respite from smog for Delhi as AQI is 'very poor'

NEW DELHI, 28 DEC

The air quality in the national capital was in the "very poor" category on Sunday morning with an overall Air Quality Index reading of 392, according to the Central Pollution Control Board. Data from the Central Pollution Control Board's Sameer app showed that 19 monitoring stations in the city reported air quality in the "severe" category, with Anand Vihar recording the highest reading of 444. The minimum temperature settled at 6.3 degrees Celsius. The maximum temperature is likely to hover around 21 degrees Celsius, with the weather department fore-casting mainly clear skies. *—PTI*

>>>More on Page 5

Myanmar votes in 1st election since military coup

YANGON, 28 DEC

Voters went to the polls Sunday for the initial phase of Myanmar's first general election in five years, held under the supervision of its military government. Final results will not be known until after two more rounds of voting are completed later in January. A new Election Protection Law imposes harsh penalties and restrictions for virtually all public criticism of the polls. In these circumstances, both the military and its opponents believe power is likely to remain with Senior Gen Min Aung Hlaing, who led the 2021 seizure of power. Voting is taking place in three phases, with Sunday's first round. *—PTI*

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9 men return after being stranded in Kyrgyzstan

PILIBHIT, 28 DEC

Nine Pilibhit residents stranded in Kyrgyzstan for three months have returned home safely, officials said, while three others are expected back by 30 December. District Magistrate Gyanendra Singh said all 12 victims belong to various areas of Pilibhit and urged people to remain vigilant against fraudsters. Twelve Pilibhit residents were stranded across various cities in Kyrgyzstan for about three months after allegedly being duped by a recruiting agent, who took Rs 2.5 lakh each. The scam came to light after a video by one of the victims, Rohit, surfaced, revealing they were sent on 59-day visas with fake contracts. The men were allegedly held hostage, beaten and forced to work without pay. *—PTI*

2.8 cr names to be deleted in UP's SIR

18% of voters to be deleted, most from cities

KOLKATA, 28 DEC

The draft electoral roll in Uttar Pradesh, which will be published on 31 December, is likely to have the names of about 12.55 crore voters, with almost 2.89 crore names deleted from the pre-SIR voter list. Those excluded will have a chance to contest the deletion starting 1 January, the state's chief electoral officer said on Sunday.

Among the 12,55,56,000 voters who have made it to the draft list, more than 1 crore are in the "unmapped" category, meaning notices will be sent out to them to furnish self-attested documents from among the list of the 12 mandated by the Election Commission (EC) to be moved into the "mapped" category, Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) Navdeep Rinwa said.

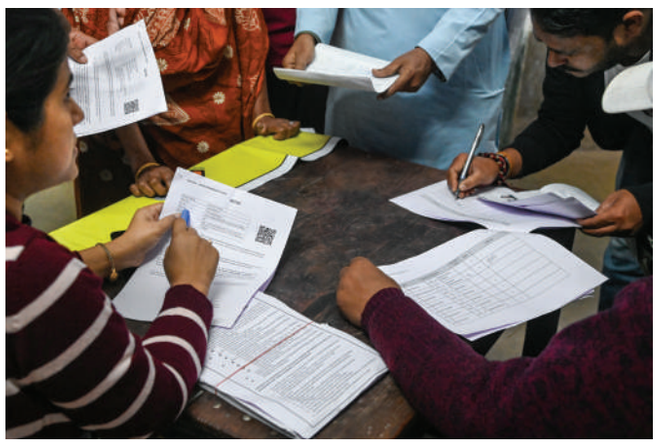
The nearly 52-day Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls began in the state on 4 November and concluded after two extensions on 26 December.

The deletion of 2,88,75,000 names, accounting for roughly 18.70 per cent of the total 15,44,00,000 voters who were part of the pre-SIR electoral roll, was done for a variety of reasons like death, change of residence or being enrolled as voters elsewhere, Rinwa said.

Most of the deletions were reported from big urban centres, including Lucknow, Ghaziabad, Prayagraj and Kanpur, the officer said.

Between 1 and 31 January, Rinwa said, the EC will also invite objections to the inclusion of the nearly 12.55 crore names. These objections can be filed by filling out Form 7.

The announcment political slugfest in Uttar Pradesh, the country's most populous state. The Opposition, particularly the Samajwadi Party and the Congress, have flagged concerns over the SIR exercise, alleging that it is tailored to suit the ruling BJP. The BJP accused them of sheilding infiltrators.



People at a school during a hearing for the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls, in Kolkata, on Sunday *PHOTO: PTI*

BLO DIES BY SUICE IN WB

A Booth Level Officer (BLO) was found dead in West Bengal's Bankura district on Sunday, triggering allegations that work-related pressure linked to the ongoing Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls may have played a role, police said.

In his alleged suicide note, Haradhan Mandal reportedly referred to being unable to cope with work pressure as a BLO, a police officer said. The TMC said that over 50 lives have been lost due to anxiety during the SIR.

WB EC HAULTS HEARING FOR UNMAPPED VOTERS

The EC has issued fresh instructions to district election officials in West Bengal, directing that voters marked as "unmapped" in the BLO app due to technical issues linked to the digitisation of the 2002 electoral rolls should not be called for hearings, even if such notices have been auto-generated by the system. *—PTI*

Govt forms team to study student union election

BENGALURU, 28 DEC

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar, has constituted a committee of party leaders to study the process and modalities for conducting student union elections in the State, and to submit a report.

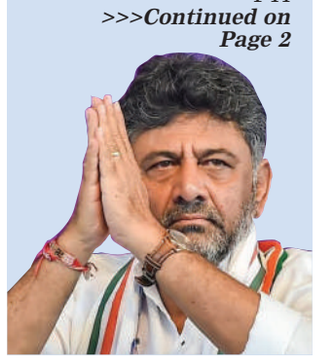
Shivakumar, who is also the KPCC President, during a recent Constitution Day event, had spoken reintroducing student union elections in Karnataka, which he said would create political leadership on campuses.

Medical Education Minister Sharan Praksah Patil has been appointed as the convenor of the nine-member committee, which includes Higher Education Minister Sudhakar, MLAs, MLCs, and State Presidents of Youth Congress and National Students' Union of India (NSUI).

The committee has been asked to submit its report and recommendations within 15 days, Shivakumar said in a letter dated 27 December.

—PTI

>>>Continued on Page 2



Members of a Hindu organisation protest against the killing of Hindus in Bangladesh, at Freedom Park in Bengaluru on Sunday *PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD*

Bangladesh claims Hadi's killers ran to India, BSF denies it

SHILLONG, 28 DEC

Indian security agencies dismissed claims by the Bangladesh Police that the killers of Inquilab Moncho leader Sharif Osman Hadi had entered Meghalaya.

A top Dhaka Metropolitan Police officer earlier on Sunday said that two primary suspects in the Hadi murder case have crossed into Meghalaya via the Haluaghat border "with the help of local associates".

The claims are unfounded and misleading, Meghalaya BSF Chief Inspector General OP Opadhyay responded. "There is no evidence to suggest that any individual crossed the international border from the Haluaghat sector into Meghalaya. The BSF has neither detected nor received any report of such an incident".

Hadi, 32, was shot in the head on 12 December during an election campaign in Dhaka. He died while on 18 December. His death caused massive unrest in Bangladesh, resulting in media houses being attacked. A Hindu man was also allegedly killed in the violence.

Dhaka rejected concerns raised by India over the treatment of minorities in Bangladesh, calling it an "inaccurate, exaggerated, or motivated narrative" .

On Friday, India's Ministry of External Affairs spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said it was a "grave concern".

Bangladesh foreign ministry's spokesperson SM Mahbubul Alam claimed that the remarks were "attempts to portray the isolated incidents of criminal acts as systemic persecution of the Hindus and maliciously used to propagate anti-Bangladesh sentiments" in different parts of India. *—PTI*

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Mahayuti partners Eknath Shinde of Shiv Sena and BJP's Devendra Fadnavis *PHOTO: PTI*

BJP, Sena announce consensus for civic polls

MUMBAI, 28 DEC

The ruling Mahayuti coalition has solidified agreements on 207 out of 227 seats for the upcoming Mumbai civic elections, with the BJP contesting 128 seats and the Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena 79, announced BJP city chief Amit Satam. The polls are on 15 January 2026, with counting on the following day.

Satam said, "Unanimity has been reached on 207 seats... Talks are underway on the remaining 20 seats," indicating discussions will continue regarding candidates. He highlighted the coalition's focus on corruption-free governance. "It is not about who contests how many seats. This alliance is for Hindutva and for giving Mumbai a corruption-free administration."

The Mahayuti faces competition from the Uddhav Thackeray-led Shiv Sena (UBT) and Raj Thackeray's Maharashtra Navnirman Sena. The BMC comprises 227 seats, with an electorate of over 10.3 million voters, including 5.5 million men and 4.8 million women. In the 2017 elections, the undivided Shiv Sena won 84 seats, followed by the BJP with 82. *—PTI*

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On Congress' 140th anniversary, Tharoor backs Digvijaya's RSS praise

NEW DELHI, 28 DEC

Congress leader Shashi Tharoor on Sunday backed senior party colleague Digvijaya Singh's remarks on the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), triggering open differences within the party on its 140th foundation day celebrations.

Tharoor said the Congress needed to strengthen its organisational base and was seen exchanging notes with Digvijaya Singh while seated

next to him at the foundation day function at the party's Indira Bhawan headquarters.

While some leaders supported Singh's call for organisational renewal, others dismissed the controversy. The party's top leadership sought to strike a unifying tone. Addressing the foundation day event, Rahul Gandhi said the Congress was not merely a political party but the voice of India's soul that has consistently stood with the weak and deprived.

Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge asserted that the Congress represents an enduring ideology, adding that ideologies never die. *—PTI*

>>>More on Pages 2, 3

Pakistan admits India struck Nur Khan airbase

LAHORE, 28 DEC

Pakistan's Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar has admitted that India attacked the Nur Khan airbase on 10 May. The rare acknowledgment came months after India's Operation Sindoor.

Dar said the strike on the airbase followed Pakistan's interception of 79 of 80 Indian drones within 36 hours, and prompted a retaliatory response from Islamabad. He also claimed, without offering evidence, that Pakistan shot down seven Indian fighter jets on 7 May.

Dar said Pakistan did not seek outside mediation, but US Secretary of State Marco Rubio said on 10 May that India was ready for a ceasefire. Separately, President Asif Ali Zardari revealed he was advised to take shelter in a bunker when hostilities began but refused, saying leaders do not hide. He reiterated that Pakistan wants peace but remains fully prepared to defend itself. *—PTI*

SATCOM ROLLOUT AWAITS SECURITY CLEARANCE: SCINDIA

NEW DELHI, 28 DEC

Union Telecom Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia said satellite communication services in India, including Elon Musk's Starlink, will be rolled out only after they meet security requirements, with spectrum allocation to follow once the DoT finalises pricing in consultation with Trai. The Digital Communication Commission will decide what's next.

He said Vodafone Idea's (VIL) request for relief is under consideration. The government has converted dues of Rs 37,000 crore into equity, giving it a 49 per cent stake in the firm. VIL told the DoT its total liabilities stand at Rs 2 lakh crore.

Without further relief, VIL faces annual payments of about Rs 18,000 crore from March 2026, far exceeding its annual cash generation. While the company has warned of a duopoly and higher tariffs, Scindia said the telecom market is robust. *—PTI*

COPS FINE MUSLIMS

Love jihad: Right-wingers disrupt b'day bash

BAREILLY, 28 DEC

A group of Right-wing activists barged into a restaurant here and gate-crashed a birthday party, alleging "love jihad". Police got involved and fined two Muslim youths, who were among the 10 attendees of the party, and a staffer of the establishment for "disturbing the peace".

The incident occurred on Saturday night when a first-year BSc Nursing student hosted her birthday party at the restaurant in the Prem Nagar area that was attended by nine friends -- five women and four men. Of the four, two -- Shan and Waqif -- were Muslim.

The presence of Muslim youths with a Hindu woman led some members of a Right-wing organisation to disrupted the party at a restaurant, raised slogans, and accused the youths of "love jihad", police said.

Video purportedly showing Right-wing activists barging into a cafe over the presence of Muslim youth in a birthday party *PHOTO: SCREENGRAB*

Officials from the Prem Nagar police station took the student and others to the police station for questioning. Initially, one Muslim youth was taken into custody, while the other managed to flee.

Station House Officer Raj Bali said the student resides in a hostel in Prem Nagar and is pursuing BSc Nursing from a private college. "We called her relatives, and informed the families of the others" .

Police initially prepared a challan for breach of peace against Shan and cafe staffer Shailendra Gangwar. However, upon learning that another Muslim youth -- Waqif -- fled, Circle Officer First Ashutosh Shivam launched a search and traced him. "All three -- two youths and the cafe staffer -- were challaned for disturbing peace." *—PTI*

Coal mine protest turns violent in Chhattisgarh

RAIGARH, 28 DEC

Several policemen were injured and vehicles set ablaze after a protest against a coal mining project turned violent in Tamnar, Chhattisgarh, officials said.

The unrest began at CHP Chowk in Libra village, where residents of 14 affected villages under the Gare Pelma Sector-I coal block have been staging a sit-in since 12 December, opposing a public hearing held on 8 December at Dhaurabhatha. Around 300 protesters initially gathered, blocking roads and disrupting traffic. Police and revenue officials intervened to persuade them to return to the designated protest site.

However, the crowd swelled to around 1,000 as people from nearby villages joined. Despite repeated appeals to maintain peace, the protest turned violent around 2.30 pm, with demonstrators breaking police barricades and attacking personnel with stones and sticks. Senior officers, including SDOP Anil Vishwakarma and Tamnar police station in-charge Kamla Pusam, sustained serious injuries, along with several other policemen, including women personnel.

The mob set ablaze a police bus, a jeep, and an ambulance, and damaged multiple government vehicles. They then stormed the Jindal Power coal handling plant, torching a conveyor belt, two tractors, other vehicles, and vandalising office premises, authorities confirmed. *—PTI*

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PHOTO: FREEPIK

Dacoits loot Rs 5 cr worth of jewellery in Hunsur

MYSURU, 28 DEC

Armed dacoits looted gold and jeweller worth Rs 5 crore after opening fire, creating panic in broad daylight at Hunsur town in the district on Sunday afternoon at 3pm. The masked armed dacoits entered into Sky Gold and Diamonds Jewellery Shop located at the back of Hunsur Town Bus Stand, opened gunfire, threatened the manager of the jewellery shop Azghar at gunpoint, scared the few customers who were present at the shop with shooting down them, made away with gold and diamond jewelleries. They escaped after collecting the jewelleries in a bag brought by them. One of the dacoits who was wearing a helmet escaped after leaving his helmet in the shop. Hunsur Town Police have registered a case and investigation is underway. *—Salar News*

Parameshwara fan club demands he be made CM

MYSURU, 28 DEC

G Parameshwara Fans Association President Bilikere Raju on Sunday urged Congress High Command to make the Home Minister and Dalit leader the next CM. Speaking to reporters at a press conference held at a private hotel here, he said that Congress should give an opportunity for dalits if CM Siddaramaiah is replaced in the state. Dalits unitedly supported Congress to come to power in the State, Raju said. Even though Parameshwara had a chance to become CM during 2013 term, he missed the opportunity as he was defeated in the assembly polls by conspiracy, Raju alleged. As supporters of CM Siddaramaiah are holding AHINDA convention next month in Mysuru, Bilikere Raju urged organisers of this convention to involve Dalits. *—Salar News*

Ram Sena demand NIA probe into Mysuru blast

MYSURU, 28 DEC

Sri Ram Sene Founder President Pramod Muthalik demanded that the Mysuru Palace hydrogen gas explosion, which killed three people, should be investigated by the National Investigation Agency (NIA). Speaking to reporters here on Sunday, he also appealed to the police to take the case seriously as the incident took place near a tourist spot.

"The dead balloon seller, Saleem, who is allegedly from Uttar Pradesh, and four others were staying in a Mysuru lodge. The police and the NIA must seriously probe this case in the larger interests of national security. The police must check their backgrounds," he said. Meanwhile, the city police have stepped up security near the Mysuru Palace. *—Salar News*

Is Venugopal K'taka's super CM? asks BJP

Amid eviction row, LoP questions autonomy

BENGALURU/ NEW DELHI, 28 DEC

Accusing AICC General Secretary (Organisation) KC Venugopal of intervening in Karnataka's administration in light of an eviction row in the City, opposition BJP on Sunday asked whether he is "super CM" of the state.

The State deserves respect, autonomy, and honest governance, and not High-Command "theatrics", Leader of Opposition (LoP) in Assembly R Ashoka said. He termed Venugopal's remarks as an assault on federalism.

He was responding to Venugopal's post on X regarding the demolition of some 200 unauthorised constructions in Kogilu, Yelahanka.

Stating that he has spoken to CM Siddaramaiah and his Deputy DK Shivakumar, Venugopal on Saturday conveyed "the AICC's serious concern that such actions should have been undertaken with far greater caution, sensitivity, and compassion, keeping the human impact at the centre."

Venugopal's statement came in the wake of Kerala CM Pinarayi Vijayan criticising the demolition drive as the "brutal normalisation of the bulldozer raj".

Ashoka asked, "Who is Venugopal to intervene in the administration of Karnataka? Is he a Super CM, or does the Congress High Command believe elected State governments function on Delhi diktats?"

AICC Secretary KC Venugopal and BJP leader R Ashoka **PHOTO: ANI**

"Has Venugopal ever shown the same urgency when medical and other waste from Kerala have been illegally dumped along Karnataka's borders, threatening Bandipur, forest regions, public health, and wildlife?" he asked. "Karnataka is not a colony of Rahul Gandhi and his coterie."

"The people of this state did not vote for a remote control government," Ashoka said.

Similarly, BJP IT Cell head Amit Malviya said Venugopal's comments undermine the authority of Karnataka's elected leadership.

"First it was Rajiv Gandhi who publicly humiliated the towering Karnataka leader Veerendra Patil. Now, decades later, the pattern repeats, with Venugopal lecturing Siddaramaiah and Shivakumar on how to run the State," he said on X post.

The Opposition JD(S) also launched a similar attack. It accused Venugopal and Vijayan of performing "alliance politics". Noting that the houses demolished were occupied by primarily Muslim migrants, it asked what the problem was when "infiltrators" were evicted. *—PTI*

DKS: Can't remove Gandhi from history

DyCM slams G Ram G, hails Cong's history

BENGALURU, 28 DEC

Deputy Chief Minister and Congress leader DK Shivakumar on Sunday hailed the party's history on its 140th Foundation Day, while rhetorically asking if removing Mahatma Gandhi's name from the rural employment scheme would remove his name from history.

Announcing that he has written a book on Mahatma Gandhi, Shivakumar flayed the BJP for replacing Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, 2005 (MGNREGA) with the Viksit Bharat-Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin) Act (VB-G Ram G).

"Is it possible to remove Mahatma Gandhi's name from history?" the KPCC President asked.

Lauding the grand old party, Shivakumar said, "In Congress, those who sit on the stage are not leaders; the workers working at the booth level are the real leaders, and our Congress party was established 140 years ago. We are called Congresspeople. This history is not for others."

"What history does the BJP have? We were born for the independence of this country. Is it possible to remove Mahatma Gandhi's name from history? I have written a book on Gandhi. I will have it released by President Mallikarjun Kharge. I have planned to build 100 Congress offices; 70 have already been built. We are going to build State and district Congress buildings in Bengaluru. We will discuss this in the next Cabinet," he said.

CM Siddaramaiah, DyCM DK Shivakumar for the 140th Congress Foundation Day in City on Sunday **PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD**

Similarly, Chief Minister Siddaramaiah said that the heirs of the freedom struggle are the Congress party.

Siddaramaiah alleged that the BJP's parent organisations the Jana Sangh, RSS and Hindu Maha Sabha did not participate in the freedom struggle. He added that the BJP was not present during the Non-Cooperation movement. "Their only work is dividing the country."

Noting that MGNREGA was formulated when Manmohan Singh was prime minister, Siddaramaiah noted that the name had been changed to replace "Gandhi" with "Ram".

The Ram they talk about is not the divine Ram, but the Ram of the BJP," he said. Siddaramaiah alleged that the decision to replace MGNREGA came from the Prime Minister's office and even Cabinet members and concerned ministers were not aware of the move.

—Salar with agencies

City demolitions not comparable to UP: Muslim League

KOZHIKODE/ BENGALURU, 28 DEC

IUML leader PK Kunhalikutty on Sunday said the demolition of houses in Bengaluru was not comparable to what happened in Uttar Pradesh.

Speaking to reporters in Kozhikode, the Indian Union Muslim League (IUML) National Secretary said he had spoken to leaders in Karnataka, including Ministers and the Chief Minister. "They said that... people from all communities were affected".

"It is cheap politics to take advantage of the issue knowing that a Congress government is in power in Karnataka," he said.

Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan on Friday strongly criticised last week's demolitions.

PK Kunhalikutty **PHOTO: WIKI COMMONS**

DyCM DK Shivakumar said the government is willing to "rehabilitate those people if they are genuine and if they are local people. We will do whatever we can under the Rajiv Gandhi housing scheme." *—PTI*

CHILY DAYS

Smog covers the Kempegowda International Airport road in the early hours, in Bengaluru, on Sunday. Temperatures went as low as 15 degress Celsius in parts of the City **PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD**

M'rashtra drug bust a joint effort, says HM

BENGALURU, 28 DEC

Following the Maharashtra Anti-Narcotics Task Force's (ANTF) announcement of three mephedrone manufacturing units being dismantled in the City, State Home Minister G Parameshwara clarified that the operation was a collaborative effort involving state police and Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) teams.

"The Maharashtra police had informed their Karnataka counterparts before the raids and sought assistance," he stated, explaining that the operation was based on intelligence gathered from an arrest in Mumbai.

While Maharashtra authorities claimed the contraband seized was worth Rs 55.88 crore, Parameshwara disputed this, asserting, "It's about 3.5kg of chemicals, which costs approximately Rs 30 lakhs per kg. Totally it is approximately Rs 1.20 crore." He also refuted reports of three manufacturing units being raided, stating that only one location was involved.

Parameshwara indicated that the state police, in collaboration with the NCB, have intensified anti-drug operations following alerts of potential drug stocking ahead of New Year celebrations, leading to seizures totalling Rs 165 crore thus far. He warned that action would be taken against officers failing to address drug-related activities in their domains. *—PTI*

City to deploy 20,000 cops for New Year's celebrations

BENGALURU, 28 DEC

Home Minister G Parameshwara on Sunday announced that around 20,000 police personnel and officials will be deployed across Bengaluru to ensure peaceful New Year celebrations, with authorities expecting more than one million people to gather in the city. Last year, around 7,00,000 to 8,00,000 people had congregated at various locations.

Speaking after a meeting with police officials, Parameshwara identified key crowd-prone areas, including Koramangala, Indira Nagar, the Central Business District (CBD), and Niladri Road.

The deployment will include 14,000 personnel for law and order, 2,500 for traffic management, 88 Karnataka State Reserve Police (KSRP) platoons, 21 City Armed Reserve (CAR) platoons, and 250 Cobra bike personnel. Emphasis has been placed on women's safety, crowd management, and security, particularly in light of the recent Delhi blast. Bars and restaurants have been instructed to adhere strictly to the 1am closing deadline.

To enhance safety, authorities have introduced several new initiatives. QR codes containing essential information have been distributed to pubs, restaurants, malls, and public spaces. Watch towers, focus lights, access control facilities, and vehicle checkpoints have been set up in major areas. Drone and CCTV surveillance will complement existing systems, and safety shelters, ambulances, and fire tenders will be strategically positioned.

For the first time, City will use a "heatmap" system to identify high-density crowd areas in real time, relaying information to the control center to aid crowd management. In the past five days alone, 2,854 drunk-driving cases have been registered in a pre-New Year enforcement drive. *—PTI*

STRICT ENFORCEMENT

With the nearly 8,00,000 people thronging to the streets for New Year celebration, the State government is enforcing strict measures to prevent any untoward incident.

- 'Heatmaps' to identify high density crowded areas
- Temporary CCTVs to be installed in over 150 locations
- 15 'safety-shelters' to be set up
- Bars, restaurants must adhere to 1am deadline

2ND PREZ TO DO SO

Murmu takes submarine sortie at Karwar base

KARWAR, 28 DEC

President Droupadi Murmu on Sunday undertook a dived sortie aboard the Indian Navy's indigenously built frontline submarine INS Vaghsheer off the Western seaboard. Accompanied by Chief of Naval Staff Admiral Dinesh K Tripathi, Murmu—also the Supreme Commander of the armed forces—boarded the Kalvari-class submarine from the Karwar naval base.

She is the second Indian President to undertake a submarine sortie, after APJ Abdul Kalam in February 2006 aboard INS Sindhu Rakshak.

"Murmu undertook a dive sortie on the Western Seaboard aboard INS Vaghsheer," the President's Secretariat said. She was briefed on the submarine arm's role in India's maritime strategy, its operational capabilities, and contributions to safeguarding national maritime interests.

- Described by Navy officials as one of the world's most silent and versatile diesel-electric submarines the indigenous INS Vaghsheer was launced in 2022

Murmu commended the crew's dedication, commitment, and spirit of selfless service, and lauded the indigenous submarine as a "shining example" of the Navy's professional excellence, combat readiness, and unwavering commitment to security.

INS Vaghsheer, the sixth and final submarine of the P75 Scorpene project, was commissioned in January. Described by Navy officials as one of the world's most silent and versatile diesel-electric submarines, it was launched on 20 April 2022 and has completed successful sea trials. Vaghsheer joins its sister vessels INS Kalvari, INS Khanderi, INS Karanj, INS Vela, and INS Vagir, commissioned between December 2017 and January 2023.

In October, Murmu took a sortie in a Rafale fighter jet from the Indian Air Force Station in Ambala, becoming the first President to fly in two different fighter aircraft of the Indian Air Force (IAF). Previously, she undertook a sortie in a Sukhoi 30 MKI in April 2023 from Tezpur in Assam. *—Agencies*

President Droupadi Murmu with Chief of the Naval Staff Admiral Dinesh K Tripathi during a sortie on the Navy's indigenous Kalvari class submarine INS Vaghsheer at Karwar Naval Base on Sunday **PHOTO: PTI**

Govt forms committee for student union election

>>>Continued from Page 1

The committee being formed to study modalities for student union elections aims at obtaining detailed information about the current conditions and the feasibility for conducting such elections, KPCC Chief DK Shivakumar said.

Student elections were banned in Karnataka in 1989 by the then Congress government led by Chief Minister Veerendra Patil, reportedly in response to a series of violent incidents and clashes on college campuses, as well as the increasing influence of political parties in campus life.

Terms of Reference (TOR) for the committee include studying and recommending on the stages at which elections can be held; pros, cons and consequences of holding elections; to provide a detailed report on whether elections should be held under the name of a party or based solely on ideologies or in a non-political manner, with the aim of student welfare.

The committee will also study aspects like election and candidacy qualifications; information about the process and system for conducting elections; election costs and transparency; complaint resolution and security system; representation and inclusive education (participation); reservation of seats or quota for women, marginalised communities and students with disabilities, and regarding determining the duration of the student union without disrupting the education and academic schedule of the students. *—PTI*

QUOTE of THE DAY

When I entered the cinema, I thought I was building a small sand house here ... But fans helped me build a fort... That's why I've decided to stand for them. For the fans who gave up everything for me, I'm giving up cinema itself

—VIJAY,
TVK Chief

Unmapped voters crowd SIR camps in Bengal

Elderly and specially-abled voters were made to wait in long queue on Day 2 of hearing

KOLKATA, 28 DEC

Hearings under the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls continued for the second day on Sunday across West Bengal, with queues forming at 3,234 centres as nearly 32 lakh "unmapped" voters were called for verification, officials said.

The "unmapped" category includes electors whose details could not be linked to the 2002 electoral roll. Scenes at camps highlighted distress among elderly, ailing and marginalised voters. In Howrah's Sankrail block, 75-year-old polio-afflicted Sabita Manna waited in an ambulance, anxious over discrepancies in her voter details. "At this age, it hurts to prove your citizenship again," she said.

Similar anxiety was seen elsewhere. In Barasat, Nirufa Khatoon said she could not establish linkage as her parents were deceased. In Midnapore, residents of Hatath colony reported that only two out of ten names per household appeared in the draft rolls, despite many having voted regularly for decades. In Bardhaman, a woman could not attend the hearing as her child is undergoing cancer treatment in Mumbai.

The unmapped category includes electors whose details could not be linked to the 2002 electoral roll **PHOTO: PTI**

At a camp in south Kolkata, Mayor and MLA Firhad Hakim said many voters rendered "unmapped" due to technical glitches need not attend hearings, as the onus lies with the Election Commission to resolve linkage issues.

Meanwhile, the Trinamool Congress accused the EC of "forcing" elderly people, persons with disabilities and the seriously ill to attend distant camps instead of sending officials for home verification.

The EC had published the draft electoral rolls on 16 December, deleting over 58 lakh names citing death, migration and non-submission of enumeration forms.

The Centre has provided Y-plus category CISF security cover to West Bengal Chief Electoral Officer Manoj. Officials said the move followed central agency assessments of potential risks arising from the SIR exercise. *—PTI*

On 140th year, Cong says its ideology will never die

NEW DELHI, 28 DEC

On its 140th Foundation Day on Sunday, Rahul Gandhi said that the Congress is not just a political party, but the voice of India's soul that has stood with the weak and the deprived.

He attended the 140th Foundation Day function at the Indira Bhawan headquarters of the party here.

In a post on X, he said, "We resolve to fight even more strongly the battle for truth, courage, and to protect the Constitution against hatred, injustice, and dictatorship."

"Heartiest greetings to every Congressman on the Foundation Day of the Indian National Congress today. We pay homage to those great sacrifices that won freedom for India, laid the foundation of the Constitution, and strengthened the values of democracy, secularism, social justice and equality," he added.

Congress chief Mallikarjun Kharge asserted that the Congress is an ideology and that ideologies never die.

Speaking at the Indira Bhawan on Sunday, he said India has become the world's largest democracy due to Congress leaders.

"Today, on Foundation Day, I want to clearly say one thing to those who say 'the Congress is finished.' I want to tell them that our power may be less, but our spine is still straight. We have not compromised; not with the Constitution, not with secularism and not with the rights of the poor," he said.

Noting that the Congress has never asked for votes in the name of religion, Kharge asserted that the party has never spread hatred in the name of temple and mosque. *—PTI*

Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge and Sonia Gandhi at 140th Foundation Day of the party, at Indira Bhawan in New Delhi **PHOTO: PTI**

Tharoor backs Digvijaya, calls for changes in party

NEW DELHI, 28 DEC

Congress leader Shashi Tharoor endorsed the views of party colleague Digvijaya Singh, saying that the organisation should be strengthened.

At the 140th Foundation Day event at the Congress' Indira Bhawan headquarters, Tharoor was seated next to Digvijaya Singh and exchanged notes.

Ahead of the CWC meet on Saturday, Singh created a flutter by hailing the organisational power of the RSS-BJP by sharing Modi's old picture and saying that a grassroots BJP worker could become the chief minister and prime minister.

He also raised the issue of strengthening the Congress organisation at the grassroots, asserting that it was needed to fight the BJP. A day later, Digvijaya Singh said he had already stated whatever he had to say. "For 50 years I have been with the Congress, and I have fought these communal forces," he said.

At the 140th Foundation Day event at the Congress' Indira Bhawan headquarters, Tharoor was seated next to Digvijaya **PHOTO: PTI**

"I have basic differences and am opposed to their ideology. I have and will continue to fight against such people," Singh said. When asked to comment on his Saturday's remarks, he said, "Every organisation needs strengthening." Tharoor, when asked to comment on the issue, said, "The organisation should be strengthened, there is no doubt." On being seated next to Singh and whether the two exchanged views on the matter, Tharoor said, "We are friends and talk to each other." In a post on X, he said, "Today marks the 140th anniversary of the founding of the Indian National Congress, an organisation that played a pivotal role in leading India's struggle for independence." *—PTI*

And I have a suspicion that there may be another big division of Congress in the future

-Narendra Modi, Prime Minister, after Bihar polls

CAPTAIN HONOURED

Leaders cutting across party lines in Tamil Nadu on Sunday paid floral tributes at the memorial of DMDK founder leader Vijayakanth, fondly addressed as 'Captain' on his second death anniversary **PHOTO: PTI**

J&K leaders under house arrest

SRINAGAR, 28 DEC

Authorities on Sunday placed several political leaders, including PDP chief Mehbooba Mufti and National Conference MP Aga Syed Ruhullah Mehdi, under house arrest to prevent them from joining a students' protest against the existing reservation policy in Jammu and Kashmir. Officials said those confined to their homes included Mehbooba Mufti, her daughter Iltija Mufti, Srinagar MP Ruhullah Mehdi, PDP leader Waheed Para and former Srinagar mayor Junaid Mattoo. *—PTI*

Bomb found at RJD man's Kerala home

KOZHIKODE, 28 DEC

A country-made bomb was found at the porch of the house of an RJD councillor at Azhiyur near Vadakara here on Sunday, police said. The incident occurred after the councillor allegedly voted in favour of the UDF in the election to the Vadakara block panchayat president's post, resulting in the LDF losing power. RJD is a constituent of the LDF, which won eight seats in the Vadakara block panchayat.*—PTI*

BJP will not rule in Manipur: CLP leader

IMPHAL, 28 DEC

Manipur Congress Legislature Party leader Okram Ibobi Singh on Sunday said the BJP's rule in the state and at the Centre was "not permanent" and claimed peace and coexistence would flourish only if the Congress was strengthened. He alleged that several state departments had become defunct over the past three years and the financial situation had nearly collapsed. *—PTI*

CPI(M), BJP spar over office space

T'PURAM, 28 DEC

A ruling CPI(M) MLA and a newly elected BJP councillor clashed on Sunday over an office space in a building owned by the Thiruvananthapuram Corporation, before later shaking hands and burying the hatchet.Vattiyoorkavu MLA V K Prasanth said BJP councillor R Sreelekha had called him and asked him to vacate his office in the Corporation building at Sasthamangalam. Sreelekha, awho recently won the local body election on a BJP ticket, said she had made only a "humble request". *—PTI*

Sonia told to return Nehru's letters to PMs' Museum

Union Culture and Tourism Minister Gajendra Singh Shekhawat on Sunday urged Congress leader Sonia Gandhi to return Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru's correspondence to the Prime Ministers' Museum and Library, saying the documents belonged to the nation. He said all non-official papers, including Nehru's personal letters, replies, notes and comments, were deposited at the institution between 1970 and 1990.

Congress, Vanchit Bahujan Aghadi seal deal for Mumbai polls

MUMBAI, 28 DEC

The Congress and the Vanchit Bahujan Aghadi (VBA), led by B R Ambedkar's grandson, Prakash Ambedkar, announced an alliance for the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) elections. The VBA will contest 62 of the 227 seats.

The Congress will contest around 150 seats, while some seats will be allocated to the Rashtriya Samaj Paksha and RPI (Gavai), sources said.

The tie-up decision was announced by Maharashtra Congress President Harshwardhan Sapkal and VBA state vice-president Dhairyavardhan Pundkar on Sunday.

Sapkal said that decisions on alliances for the remaining 28 municipal corporations in the state would be taken at the local level, and both parties had authorised their local leaderships to take appropriate decisions.

He said the Congress-VBA tie-up was a "natural alliance" based on shared ideology rather than mere electoral arithmetic.

Recalling that the two parties had earlier come together during the 1998 and 1999 elections, Sapkal said that after a gap of 25 years, a new chapter had begun.

VBA leader Pundkar said the alliance had been formed to stop "the divisive politics of the BJP. *—PTI*

- The Congress will contest around 150 seats, while some seats will be allocated to the Rashtriya Samaj Paksha and RPI (Gavai), sources said.

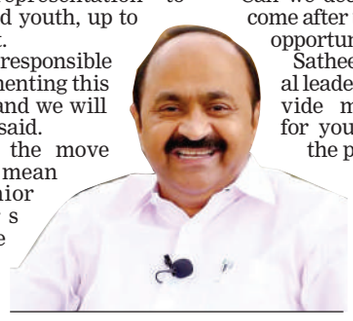
Cong mulls 50% seats for women, youth in Kerala polls: Satheesan

T'PURAM, 28 DEC

Leader of the Opposition in the Kerala Assembly VD Satheesan on Sunday said the Congress would allocate more seats to women and youth in the upcoming Assembly elections.

In an interview to a national daily, Satheesan had said that up to 50 per cent of the party's seats in the Assembly election would be allotted to women and young candidates.

Clarifying his remarks to reporters here, Satheesan said the decision was in line with the policy of the All India Congress Committee (AICC) and with Congress leader Rahul Gandhi's commitment to give greater representation to women and youth, up to 50 per cent.



"We are responsible for implementing this direction and we will do so," he said.

He said the move did not mean that senior leaders would be sidelined.

"There should be more opportunities for the younger generation. All of us came up the same way. Can we decide that those who come after us should not get an opportunity?" he asked.

Satheesan said the national leadership wished to provide more opportunities for young leaders to keep the party active.

"There will be changes, but that does not mean senior leaders will be denied chances," he said. *—PTI*

Liquor bottles, Bajrang Dal flag found in Tripura mosque

AGARTALA, 28 DEC

A mosque in Tripura's Dhalai district was allegedly desecrated in what residents and mosque authorities have described as a deliberate attempt to intimidate the local Muslim community and incite violence.

Mainama Jame Masjid, located along the Manu–Chawmanu Road, was reportedly targeted by miscreants who placed liquor bottles inside the mosque premises and attempted to set parts of the structure on fire on 24 December.

Residents and mosque authorities said the incident came to light when the imam arrived at the mosque and discovered liquor bottles inside the prayer area. A handwritten warning note and a flag associated with Bajrang Dal were also found at the site, which locals allege was meant to intimidate Muslims.

The handwritten note, photographs of which were accessed by 'Maktoob,' contains threatening language, including phrases like "This is the first and last warning" and "something big is going to happen next time," along with Hindutva slogans like "Jai Shri Ram" and a reference to Bajrang Dal. *—Agencies*

2025'S LAST MANN KI BAAT

World looks at India with hope due to youth power: PM

NEW DELHI, 28 DEC

Prime Minister Narendra Modi expressed optimism about India's future, attributing the world's growing confidence in the country to its "youth power". During his monthly radio address, 'Mann Ki Baat', he emphasised that India's advancements in science, innovation, and technology have captured international attention.

"The biggest reason for hope in India is our youth power," Modi remarked, acknowledging the passion and awareness demonstrated by young people. He noted that many youths inquire about how they can contribute to nation-building, leading to the initiative of the 'Viksit Bharat Young Leaders Dialogue'. The second edition of this dialogue is set to coincide with 'National Youth Day' on 12 January, marking Swami Vivekananda's birth anniversary.

Modi shared his enthusiasm for this event, stating, "In this, our youth will share their ideas on important topics like innovation, fitness, start-ups, and agriculture."

He highlighted the 'Smart India Hackathon', where over 13 lakh students and more than 6,000 institutions have participated over the past seven to eight years, providing innovative solutions to real-life challenges faced by various government departments.

Modi encouraged the youth to explore such platforms to showcase their talents and contribute to solving pressing issues, including those related to agriculture and cyber security. *—PTI*

Expelled TMC leader's son detained for assaulting cop

KOLKATA, 28 DEC

Golam Nabi Azad, son of Janata Unnayan Party (JUP) chief and Bharatpur MLA Humayun Kabir, was detained on Sunday for allegedly assaulting a policeman at their residence in Murshidabad district, police said.

Kabir, suspended from the TMC earlier this month, recently floated the JUP, announced plans to contest 182 assembly seats, and expressed interest in an alliance with AIMIM.

Azad, also known as Sohel, was detained following a complaint by constable Jumma Khan, who was posted as Kabir's personal security officer. The constable alleged that he was assaulted when he sought leave for a few days. Police said Azad was detained for questioning and the matter is under investigation.

- Kabir, suspended from the TMC earlier this month, recently floated the JUP.

Kabir claimed police cordoned off his residence in the Shaktipur area after the incident. He said he was away at the time and alleged his son was falsely implicated for objecting to a policeman entering the house. *—PTI*

CONG TO CONTEST 100 OF 126 SEATS IN ASSAM

TEZPUR, 28 DEC

Assam Congress President Gaurav Gogoi on Sunday announced that the party will contest 100 of the 126 seats in next year's state assembly elections, leaving the remainder for alliance partners.

Speaking at the party's 141st foundation day, Gogoi ruled out any alliance with the All India United Dem-ocratic Front (AIUDF), calling it a "communal" party. He said the Congress will partner only with like-minded parties to defeat the "anti-people BJP".

"Under no circumstances will a communal party like the AIUDF be included in this alliance," he empha-sised. Gogoi claimed the Congress, under its leadership, would restore dignity to Assam's people, uphold peace and unity, and protect the Constitution, contrasting this with the BJP, which he alleged thrives on division and authoritarianism.

The Congress deputy leader of opposition in Lok Sabha accused the BJP of systematically curtailing citi-zens' rights. He recalled that the poor had benefited during former CM Tarun Gogoi's tenure and prom-ised "real and meaningful change" if the party returns to power.

Gaurav Gogoi also pledged to enact a law imposing strict action against those spreading religious hatred. "Whether it is a church, namghar, temple or mosque, desecration will not be tolerated. Divisive forces will never succeed in Assam," he said.

As part of the celebrations, Gogoi hoisted the party flag, paid tribute to Mahatma Gandhi and cultural icon Zubeen Garg, and led a procession with senior state leaders, including Bhupen Borah and Ripun Bo-ra. *—PTI*

PHOTO: FREEPIK

Two booked for using VPN on mobiles in J&K

JAMMU, 28 DEC

Two men were booked for allegedly using Virtual Private Network (VPN) applications on their mobile phones, violating the orders of Jammu and Kashmir's Doda district administration, police said on Sunday. The accused have been identified as Khalid Abrar and Mohd Irfan, the police said.A police team from Bhagla Bharth post was deployed on routine patrol duty on Saturday and noticed Abrar using a VPN application on his mobile phone, a police spokesman said.Similarly, Irfan of Tendla village of Chilli was spotted at Shali Pul, Gandoh, using a VPN application in violation of the orders.An FIR has been registered at Gandoh police station against Irfan, and further investigation is underway, the spokesman said. *—PTI*

Missing boy found dead in pond in Kerala's Palakkad

PALAKKAD, 28 DEC

A six-year-old boy, who had been reported missing after leaving his house in this north Kerala district, was found dead in a pond on Sunday morning, police said. The body of the boy was found floating in the village pond close to his home. As soon as Suhan had gone missing from his house on Saturday afternoon, police and fire force personnel, with the assistance of the dog squad, along with local people, launched an extensive search operation. According to the FIR, Suhan went outside while playing in the compound of his house at around 1 pm and did not return. Chittur police said Suhan is a differently abled child and he had gone out after a scuffle with his brother. *—PTI*

Explosion at firing range in UP leaves four jawans hurt

SAHARANPUR, 28 DEC

Four Army personnel were injured after an explosion occurred during firing practice at the reserved Badkala firing range here, police said on Sunday. According to Superintendent of Police (Rural) Sagar Jain, the incident took place on Saturday evening when routine firing exercises were underway and the police teams from Mirzapur and Behat rushed to the spot and shifted the injured soldiers to the Behat Primary Health Centre. The injured personnel were identified as Suresh, 45, Pavitra, 35, Deepak, 27, and Praveen, 30. Of them, Deepak and Suresh are undergoing treatment, he said. Jain said Army officials have informed that all four personnel are safe and are receiving proper medical treatment. *—PTI*

Woman hacked by husband dies in Kozhikode

KOZHIKODE, 28 DEC

A 32-year-old woman who was allegedly hacked by her husband earlier this week died at the Medical College Hospital here on Sunday, police said. The deceased has been identified as Muneera MK of Pandisala Road in Farook. According to police, the incident occurred on December 24 at around 9.40am, when Muneera's husband Abdul Jabbaar allegedly attacked her with a dagger after she refused his demand for money. She sustained severe injuries to her head and neck and was rushed to the hospital and had been undergoing treatment at Kozhikode Medical College Hospital, where she succumbed to her injuries on Sunday morning, a police officer said. Jabbaar was arrested soon after the incident. *—PTI*

Protesters allege violation by Jindal in mining project

Chhattisgarh govt allegedly displaced tribals for the project

TAMNAR, 28 DEC

Villagers in Chhattisgarh's Tamnar, who have been demanding for the cancellation of the Gare Pelma Sector-I coal block project, alleged that the public hearing held for its clearance on 8 December violated prescribed norms.

The project was allocated to Jindal Power Limited.

The protesters said the situation turned tense after police attempted to remove the protesters from the demonstration site at CHP Chowk in Libra village on Saturday morning.

Rajesh Singh Markam of Kasdol village lodged a complaint with Raigarh SP, claiming he had received threats from the local SHO. Videos circulating on social media showed violent clashes, including a woman police officer being assaulted while others tried to shield her.

Local leaders, including Lailunga MLA Vidyawati Sidar, Raigarh Collector Mayank Chaturvedi, and Superintendent of Police Divyang Patel, intervened to pacify the crowd, but stones were hurled again, and another arson incident was reported inside the coal handling plant.

Videos show violent clashes, including a woman police officer being assaulted *PHOTO: SCREENGRAB*

Collector Chaturvedi said the protest had been largely peaceful for 15 days, with facilities provided by the administration. He added that anti-social elements provoked the crowd on Saturday afternoon, leaving security personnel injured.

Efforts are underway to identify the instigators and restore dialogue. The injured have been shifted to Raigarh for treatment and are in stable condition.

Chhattisgarh Congress president Deepak Baij called the clash "unfortunate" and blamed the state government for displacing villagers and tribals to benefit industrialists.

Baij alleged that the peaceful protest turned violent after provocation by authorities, terming the public hearing "fake."

Police said the situation remains tense but under control, with security reportedly tightened across the area. *—PTI*

CBI CONTESTS SENGAR BAIL

SC to hear Unnao rape case today

NEW DELHI, 28 DEC

The Supreme Court is slated to hear on Monday a plea by the CBI challenging the Delhi High Court order suspending the life sentence of expelled BJP MLA Kuldeep Singh Sengar in the Unnao rape case.

A three-judge bench of Chief Justice of India Surya Kant and Justices JK Maheshwari and Augustine George Masih will hear the matter.

- The SC will hear a petition, which has challenged the high court order, and has sought a stay on it.

The SC will hear a petition filed by advocates Anjale Patel and Pooja Shilpkar, which has challenged the high court order, and has sought a stay on it.

The CBI, in its appeal before the apex court, referred to its verdict in the L K Advani case in which it held that anyone who holds public office, like MPs or MLAs, would be deemed a public servant.

The CBI contended that the high court erred by declaring that Sengar, an MLA when the offence was committed, was not a public servant to be prosecuted under POCSO and granted him bail. "The high court failed to consider that a sitting MLA is vested with public trust and that such a position carries responsibility and duties owed to the state and society," the CBI said.

"It erred by failing to adopt a purposive interpretation that advances the POCSO Act," the CBI said.

On 23 December, the high court suspended the jail term of Sengar, who is serving life imprisonment in the Unnao rape case, saying he has already served seven years and five months. *— PTI*

SC to hear case on Aravalli Hills today

NEW DELHI, 28 DEC

Amid a row over the definition of Aravalli Hills approved by it, the Supreme Court has taken suo motu cognisance of the issue and is slated to hear the matter on Monday.

A three-judge bench of Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justices JK Maheshwari and Augustine George Masih will hear the matter.

The case is titled 'In Re: Definition of Aravalli Hills and Ranges and Ancillary Issues.' On 20 November, the SC had accepted a uniform definition of the Aravalli Hills and had banned the issue of mining leases inside its areas in Delhi, Haryana, Rajasthan and Gujarat until the reports of experts are available. *— PTI*

AFTER PROTEST

J&K arabic lecturer suspended over school 'prayer platform'

JAMMU, 28 DEC

Authorities in Jammu and Kashmir's Rajouri district have recommended the suspension of an Arabic lecturer of a government higher secondary school for allegedly ordering the construction of a platform on the school building for praying, officials said on Sunday.

Quoting a letter issued by the Chief Education Officer (CEO), Rajouri, the officials said Munnawar Hussain, Lecturer (Arabic), posted at the Higher Secondary School, Chingus, was prima facie found to have directed the construction of the platform on the roof of a newly constructed block of the institution.

The Chief Education Officer in the letter to the Director, School Education Jammu, on Saturday recommended suspending the lecturer.

The Chief Education Officer said he, along with the district education planning officer, visited the school as per the direction of the Deputy Commissioner and met the people of the area.

The lecturer was directed to report to the office of the Chief Education Officer for duties, the officials said. *— PTI*

- Munnawar Hussain, Lecturer (Arabic) at Chingus Higher Secondary School, found to have directed the construction of the platform on the roof of a newly constructed block of the institution.

Pilot dies in paragliding accident at Bir Billing in HP

DHARAMSHALA, 28 DEC

An experienced pilot Mohan Singh, a resident of Mandi district, was killed when a paraglider had a technical malfunction, crashing near the road below the launch site in Kangra district. The incident occurred at Bir Billing paragliding site on Friday evening.

According to officials of the Bir Billing Paragliding Association, the paraglider developed a technical malfunction shortly after take off, lost balance mid-air, and crashed near the road below the launch site. The pilot died while the accompanying tourist sustained injuries who was taken to hospital for the treatment. *—PTI*

Internet services back in violence-hit Assam districts

GUWAHATI/DIPHU, 28 DEC

People protest against the state government's alleged failure to solve the problems of Karbi Anglong and provide security, in Guwahati *PHOTO: ANI*

Mobile internet services in violence-hit Karbi Anglong and West Karbi Anglong of Assam were restored on Sunday following improvement in the law and order.

Strict vigil continued in the districts, along with the deployment of additional security forces in the worst-affected areas.

Two persons were killed and around 170 people injured, mostly security personnel, in West Karbi Anglong district last week.

An official in Diphu said that normalcy is being restored in the trouble-torn areas with shops opening, and people coming out to procure essentials.

The Army, Rapid Action Force and the CRPF remained deployed in the worst-hit areas, assisting police to ensure there is no violence, he said.

Prohibitory orders under Section 163 of BNSS also remained clamped, the official added.

Police had said on Saturday that 173 security personnel, belonging to the Assam Police and the CRPF, were injured in the violence. *— PTI*

A watchman turns municipal chairman in Kerala

WAYANAD,28 DEC

After his swearing-in, the new chairman of Kalpetta Municipality visited his parents for blessings, stopping his official vehicle outside their hut in a tribal colony. The modest home belongs to P Viswanathan, 40, the first chairman from the Paniya who won the Edaguni ward.

A watchman, folk singer and CPI(M) worker, Viswanathan made history as the first from the Paniya community to head the municipality. With the chairmanship reserved for Scheduled Tribes, the party picked him for the post; the Paniya are Kerala's largest ST group.

Expressing happiness over his journey, he said the tribal communities are still lagging behind the mainstream society in various matters. "I wish to bring a change in this. I wish my new position gives my community members some inspiration to come forward," Viswanathan said. V Haris, a senior CPI(M) leader in the district, expressed confidence about Viswanathan's capabilities, citing that he won from the general seat. He said a member of the Paniya community deserves the post as it is one of the major communities in the district. *—PTI*

WOMAN ASSAULTED, MADE TO WEAR SHOE GARLAND FOR AFFAIR IN TRIPURA

AGARTALA, 28 DEC

A woman was beaten up by a group of villagers in Tripura's Dhalai district over an alleged extramarital affair, police said on Sunday.

The woman, a mother of two sons, was dragged out of her house in Harerkhola village under Kamalpur police on Saturday morning and beaten up by the group, a police officer said. The villagers also forced the woman to wear a garland of shoes.

"After being informed, a police team rushed to the spot and found the woman lying on the road. Later, she was taken to the district hospital at Ambassa, where she underwent a CT scan. She is out of danger," the officer said.

A case has been registered at Kamalpur police station against some persons on Saturday, and investigation is underway, he said. One person has been arrested.

Meanwhile, the Tripura Commission for Women (TCW) chairperson, Jharna Debbarma, strongly condemned the incident on Sunday, and said the police have already registered a case about the incident and have arrested a suspect. *— PTI*

Gangster killed; kin says cops want assets

HARIDWAR, 28 DEC

Uttarkhand gangster Vinay Tyagi succumbed to injuries at a hospital on Saturday, three days after he was shot. Tyagi, a murder convict out on parole, was injured when two bikers shot at the police vehicle taking Tyagi from jail to a Laksar court on Wednesday.

The Tyagi Mahasabha termed the gangster's death suspicious and said it was a committed with the connivance of the police.His family accused the police of being complicit in his killing and demanded a CBI inquiry. Two policemen were also injured in the shootout.

Police said Tyagi, a member of the Sunil Rathi gang, sustained three bullet wounds and was admitted to AIIMS-Rishikesh. The two attackers—Sunny Yadav and Ajay—were arrested on Thursday and booked for murder after Tyagi's death, with police citing personal rivalry as the motive.

Tyagi's sister, Seema Tyagi, alleged that his death was caused by deliberate medical negligence. Claiming Tyagi had suspected a conspiracy involving police complicity, she demanded security for the family and a CBI probe, alleging that a doctor and a prominent Dehradun contractor plotted to seize his properties worth crores. *—PTI*

SRIHARIKOTA EXPANSION

ISRO developing its third launch pad

CHENNAI, 28 DEC

ISRO is developing a third launch pad at the Shriharikota spaceport and is currently identifying the right vendors for it, a top scientist said.

The Shriharikota complex covers an area of 175 sq km, is located about 135 km east of Chennai. It has been serving the Bengaluru-headquartered space agency for launching satellites using different launch vehicles.

To move ahead with its plan for bigger satellites weighing over 12,000 - 14,000 kg in various orbits in space, ISRO requires bigger launch vehicles, Padmakumar E S, the Director of the Satish Dhawan Space Centre, Shriharikota, said. The third launch pad is for this purpose.

ISRO is developing a third launch pad at the Shriharikota complex, located about 135 km east of Chennai *PHOTO: ANI*

The ISRO said the spaceport was renamed as the Satish Dhawan Space Centre (SDSC) on 5 September 2002 in memory of former ISRO Chairman, Professor Satish Dhawan.

- To move ahead with its plan for bigger satellites weighing over 14,000 kg in various orbits in space, ISRO requires bigger launch vehicles, said the Director of the space port.

The spaceport provides facilities for customers who want to launch satellites for remote sensing, communication, navigation and research.

The spaceport started operation in October 1971 with the launch of the sounding rocket 'Rohini-125.' After that, the facilities here have gradually expanded. *— PTI*

5 arrested for Tripura boy's murder in U'khand

AGARTALA, 28 DEC

Tripura Chief Minister Manik Saha on Saturday said Uttarakhand Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami has assured him that all involved in the murder of a Tripura resident in Dehradun will be arrested. Father of student killed says police delayed FIR.

Police said five have been apprehended, while another suspect, reportedly a Nepal national, may have fled the country.

Angel Chakma, 24, a resident of Nandannagar in West Tripura district, was allegedly attacked by six people on 9 December after he objected to a racial slur. He succumbed to his injuries on 26 December while undergoing treatment.

A friend of the victim told The Times of India that Angel had protested against the slur, saying they were Indians and not Chinese, following which he was brutally assaulted.

According to Dehradun SSP Ajai Singh, Angel and his brother were at a canteen near a liquor shop when a dispute broke out with another group. During the altercation, Angel was allegedly attacked with a sharp-edged weapon and a kadaa, leaving him critically injured. *— PTI*

HEAVY SMOG, STEADY PEDAL

A man pedals a bicycle amid dense smog on a cold Sunday morning in New Delhi ***PHOTO: PTI***

INDIAN AVIATION AWAITS SMOOTHER SKIES IN 2026

The Indian aviation will hope for less turbulence and long-term solutions in 2026. This year has been a year of disasters that not only snuffed out lives of 260 people but also impacted travel plans of thousands towards the fag end with IndiGo flight cancellations and air traffic control woes.

As the New Year dawns, aviation stakeholders as well as the common people will be looking for the much-awaited probe report into the AI171 plane crash on 12 June, 2025, apart from more safe helicopter operations, especially in the Kedarnath valley, and less steep fluctuation in air ticket prices.

While airfare caps became a recurring theme in 2026, airlines continued to bleed with airspace closures and network disruptions even as the duopolistic-domestic market witnessed expansion of air connectivity.

On the positive side, Navi Mumbai International Airport commenced operations on 25 December, and the Noida International Airport will be open for flights from January 2026. And new airlines are likely to take wings.

IndiGo's massive operational disruptions, mainly caused by inadequate planning in implementing the new set of Flight Duty Time Limitations (FDTL) norms, resulted in thousands of flight cancellations and caused hardships to passengers.

The fiasco triggered a high-level probe, watchdog DGCA reducing the airline's winter scheduled by 10 per cent apart from issuing show cause notices to CEO Pieter Elbers and COO Isidre Porqueras. Besides, the crisis highlighted the apparent duopoly where IndiGo (65 per cent) and Air India Group (26 per cent) account for over 90 per cent of the domestic airlines segment, a scenario that has also prompted competition watchdog DGCA to look into alleged unfair business ways of IndiGo.

The DGCA-constituted panel has submitted its probe report and now the wait is for the actions that will follow.

2025 saw a Gatwick-bound Air India Boeing plane crash moments after take-off in Ahmedabad. 260 people died and just one survived ***PHOTO: PTI***

A chaotic scene at Swami Vivekananda Airport, in Raipur, Chhattisgarh, amid flight disruptions ***PHOTO: PTI***

In what will remain as a dark chapter in the Indian aviation history, a London Gatwick-bound Air India's Boeing 787-8 aircraft crashed soon after takeoff from the Ahmedabad airport on 12 June, killing 260 people, including 241 on board and 19 on the ground. One passenger miraculously escaped the inferno.

The Aircraft Accident Investigation Bureau (AAIB), in its preliminary report released on 12 July, had said the fuel supply to both engines of the plane was cut off within a gap of one second, causing confusion in the cockpit soon after takeoff.

With speculations on the cause of the crash ranging from pilot fault to questions about AAIB investigation, Civil Aviation Minister K Rammohan Naidu, in October, asserted that there is no manipulation or dirty business happening in the investigation.

Air India's ambitious turnaround plans hit road bumps due to multiple issues, including global supply chain woes. The Air India group is set to welcome its first Boeing 737 and Boeing 787-9.

Till July, there were eight air accidents that killed 274 people. These include A171 crash, three trainee aircraft and four helicopter accidents.

The chopper crashes this year continued to put the spotlight on the risky operations in Kedarnath and hilly terrains.

Meanwhile, flight services were disrupted due to airspace closures during Operation Sindoor in May. Air India's operational costs have gone up with Pakistan airspace closure as the Tata Group-owned airline is taking longer routes for some European cities and North American destinations.

And in early November, Delhi airport, the country's busiest airport, faced air traffic control system that delayed more than 800 flights. The issue also highlighted the need for technological and infrastructure upgrades.

In November, software charges were carried out on 323 operational A320 planes by Indian carriers to address a potential issue related to flight controls and this had resulted in some flight disruptions.

In recent times, there have also been instances of GPS spoofing and interference incidents at Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, Amritsar, Hyderabad, Bengaluru and Chennai airports.

Skies in 2026

- The most anticipated piece will be the final report on the fatal A171 plane crash that will help put rest to speculations around whether pilots or Boeing aircraft issues or other reasons led to the disaster.
- Pilot fatigue, need for more manpower and stabilisation in implementation of the revised Flight Duty Time Limitations (FDTL) norms will assume significance as airlines seek to expand their networks.
- New airlines are expected to take to the skies and existing carriers are set to fly new routes.
- Global supply chain woes are expected to continue forcing airlines to press ahead with plane retrofits and more maintenance.
- Deployment of wide-body aircraft, long range A321 XLR planes, new airports will provide more tailwinds to the aviation sector. As the International Air Transport Association (IATA) puts it, India, which has historically been a challenging market for airlines to succeed, has all the ingredients to become a fantastic market. —*PTI*

LETTERS write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

SALAR سالار

Recap 2025: A look at key Supreme Court verdicts

- The apex judiciary saw a rare transition through three Chief Justices of India (CJIs) within a single year - Sanjiv Khanna, BR Gavai, and the incumbent, Surya Kant

Landmark verdicts on the powers of governors and the president on bills, staying few provisions of the Waqf law and a series of path-breaking judgements defined 2025 for the Supreme Court. The year saw an unprecedented shoe attack on CJI BR Gavai and the discovery of huge cash at high court judge Yashwant Varma's bungalow too.

The apex judiciary saw a rare transition through three Chief Justices of India (CJIs) within a single year - Sanjiv Khanna, Gavai, and the incumbent, Surya Kant.

In a move aimed at bolstering judicial independence, justices Khanna and Gavai announced their decisions to not to take any post-retiral assignments, an issue which has been debated.

This set the stage for institutional transparency, as the court began uploading the asset statements of its judges to the public domain and introduced a first-of-its-kind reservation policy for SC/ST categories in its administrative staffing.

The judiciary was rocked after burnt wads of notes were found at the official residence of Justice Varma, then sitting Delhi High Court judge, on 14 March.

After an in-house inquiry panel indicted Justice Varma, he refused to resign after being nudged by CJI Khanna, who was then compelled to write to President Droupadi Murmu and Prime Minister Narendra Modi for his impeachment. Currently, a parliamentary panel is conducting its inquiry against Varma.

On 6 October, advocate Rakesh Kishore, now suspended, hurled a shoe towards then CJI Gavai during proceedings. He was miffed over Gavai's alleged remarks on Hindu gods.

In a boost to the Centre, the apex court said its deletion of the "waqf by user" provision in the waqf law was prima facie not arbitrary and the argument that waqf lands would be grabbed by governments held "no water".

It, however, put on hold a few provisions, including a clause that only those practising Islam for the last five years could create waqf.

The tug of war between governors and opposition-ruled states over delayed or non-grant of assent to bills passed by state assemblies culminated when President Murmu moved the SC seeking its opinion on a range of issues including whether a timeline of three months, as envisaged by a verdict penned by Justice JB Pardiwala, can be fixed for governors and the president.

A five-judge bench on 20 November delivered unanimous opinion holding that the court cannot impose any timelines on governors and the president to grant assent to bills. It, however, said governors can't sit on the bills for "perpetuity".

A slew of directions, including permanent relocation of stray dogs from streets to shelters, created an uproar. A larger bench modified on 22 August the direction prohibiting the release of vaccinated stray dogs from pounds in Delhi-NCR calling it "too harsh" and ordered the canines to be released post sterilisation and de-worming.

The issue relating to the horrific Air India Dreamliner crash in Ahmedabad that claimed 260 lives also came to the SC which said no one blamed the chief pilot.

Amid growing debate over apex court setting aside its own verdicts post-retirement of the author judges, the top court on 18 November reversed its own judgement and paved the way for retrospective environmental clearance by the Centre and other authorities to projects found violating environmental norms on payment of heavy penalties.

On 26 September, the top court upheld JSW Steel's Rs 19,700-crore resolution plan for debt-ridden Bhushan Power and Steel Limited, bringing down curtains on an eight-year legal battle.

The SC also delivered a landmark verdict aimed at protecting lawyer-client privilege and issued a slew of directions to curb arbitrary summoning of advocates by probe agencies for rendering advice.

In a blow to the West Bengal government, the SC invalidated the "tainted" appointment of 25,753 school teachers and staffers.

The cases pertaining to sensational Nithari killings, where skeletal remains of eight children were found in a drain behind businessman Moninder Singh Pandher's house at Nithari in Noida on 29 December, 2006, were finally closed by the SC with the rejection of CBI's appeals in 12 cases. Surendra Koli, the only convict, walked free as the SC acquitted him.

Cracking its whip against social media influencers who were caught ridiculing persons with disabilities, the SC asked the Centre to consider framing a statute to make such derogatory remarks a penal offence.

Vantara, Reliance Foundation's zoological rescue and rehabilitation centre, came up under judicial scrutiny in SC which set up a probe team on 25 August headed by a former apex court judge to look into the allegations of irregularities. It, however, got a clean chit on 15 September. —*PTI*

Tariffs, Russia, Pakistan, H1B: 2025 really tested India-US ties

The US and India ties in 2025 have been a roller-coaster ride as punitive and reciprocal tariffs, a conflict with Pakistan and stringent immigration policies strained and tested the bilateral relationship in a manner not seen in decades.

However, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to the US to meet President Donald Trump and the signing of the 10-year defence framework pact between the two countries were seen as the high points in the relationship.

The year began on an exemplary note with Modi's visit to Washington, DC, for his first bilateral meeting with Trump in his second term in the White House in February.

Modi was only the fourth foreign dignitary - after leaders of Israel, Japan and Jordan - to meet Trump within weeks after his inauguration as 47th US President.

Trump and Modi announced plans to negotiate the first tranche of a mutually beneficial, multi-sector Bilateral Trade Agreement (BTA) by the fall of 2025, aiming to more than double trade to USD 500 billion by 2030.

A month earlier, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar sat in the front row inside the US Capitol Rotunda when he attended Trump's inauguration.

Hours later, the newly sworn-in Secretary of State Marco Rubio hosted Jaishankar, among others for the first Quad Foreign Ministers' Meeting of the new Trump administration.

But as the months rolled on, bilateral ties that were going full steam ahead encountered stumbling blocks in the form of differences over tariffs and trade.

In his address to the Joint Session of Congress, Trump criticised India and others for the high tariffs they charged on American products.

Members of Trump administration too did not hold back in their criticism, with his trade adviser Peter Navarro calling India the 'Maharaja of tariffs'.

On 2 April, which Trump proclaimed as 'Liberation Day', he slapped reciprocal tariffs on countries around the world and announced a 26 per cent "discounted reciprocal tariff" on India, half of the 52 per cent levies imposed by it on American goods.

However, Trump announced on various occasions that a trade deal with India would happen "soon".

The two nations made "significant progress" towards a mutually beneficial bilateral trade pact when US Vice President JD Vance visited India and met Modi. Vance and Modi announced the Terms of Reference for the bilateral trade agreement.

2025 also tested Prime Minister Narendra Modi and US President Donald Trump's "friendship" ***PHOTO: PTI***

It was around the time that Vance was in India that a horrific terror attack took place on 22 April in Pahalgam perpetrated by The Resistance Front, a proxy of Pakistan-based terror group Lashkar-e-Taiba, in which 26 civilians were killed.

In retaliation, India launched Operation Sindoor targeting terror infrastructure in Pakistan and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir. On 10 May, the fourth day of the conflict, Trump suddenly announced on his Truth Social page that the US had brokered a ceasefire between India and Pakistan.

And since 10 May, Trump has now repeated the claim more than 70 times that he solved the conflict between India and Pakistan and that he used trade to bring the fighting to an end.

In June, Modi and Trump were scheduled to meet on the sidelines of the G7 Leaders' Summit in Kananaskis, Canada, but Trump returned to Washington early. The two leaders, however, spoke on 17 June, a 35-minute phone call.

Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri said that Modi conveyed to Trump that at "no point" during the days following Operation Sindoor was there any discussion on an India-US Trade Deal, or any proposal for a mediation by the US between India and Pakistan.

Trump has been critical of India's purchases of Russian oil and, in August, imposed an additional 25 per cent levy on Indian imports, bringing the total tariffs imposed on India to 50 per cent, among the highest in the world.

The Trump administration has also intensified its crackdown on immigration, both legal and illegal, imposing new and stringent restrictions on visas such as H-1B, which are used by a large number of Indian professionals in the US. Trump signed a proclamation imposing a USD 100,000 fee on new H1B visas, a move that caused widespread panic among Indians. Later, Trump also appeared to defend the H1B visa programme, saying America has to bring in talent from around the world.

Even as Washington and New Delhi dealt with these complications, there were areas of cooperation between the two sides that stood out this year.

Highlighting the strong counter-terrorism cooperation, the US extradited Tahawwur Hussain Rana to India to face justice for planning the 2008 Mumbai terror attacks. Further, the US designated The Resistance Front as a foreign terrorist organisation.

The two countries also signed a 10-year defence framework pact in October even as Washington vowed to work closely with New Delhi to ensure a free and open Indo-Pacific.

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and US Secretary of War Pete Hegseth signed the framework agreement for the 'US-India major defence partnership' pact.

Modi recently said he had a "very warm and engaging conversation" with Trump, and they reviewed the progress in bilateral relations

Trump, who has described Modi as a "great friend of mine" and "a great Prime Minister", has indicated he could travel to India next year.

There is bipartisan consensus in Washington over the strategic and geopolitical importance of strong India-US ties. —*PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Ex-B'desh PM Zia's health extremely critical: Doctors

DHAKA, 28 DEC

Bangladesh's former prime minister Khaleda Zia is in an "extremely critical" condition, her personal physician has said. Zia, the 80-year-old chairperson of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), has been undergoing treatment at Dhaka's Evercare Hospital since 23 November for multiple health complications. On 11 December, she was placed on "ventilator support to give rest to her lungs and other vital organs." "It cannot be said that her condition has improved. She is passing through an extremely critical phase," Dr AZM Zahid said during a briefing held shortly after midnight on Saturday outside Evercare Hospital, without prior notice. He also urged the nation to pray for Zia's recovery, news portal bdnews24.com reported. *—PTI*

Thai parties name PM candidates ahead of Feb polls

BANGKOK, 28 DEC

Political parties in Thailand on Sunday registered candidates for prime minister, signalling the start of campaigning for the February 8 general election. Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul called an early poll after dissolving Parliament amid a looming no-confidence vote over constitutional reform. Voters will also decide in a referendum whether to draft a new constitution. The election is expected to be a three-way contest between Anutin's conservative Bhumjaithai Party, the progressive People's Party and the populist Pheu Thai Party linked to former premier Thaksin Shinawatra. Anutin, in office for three months, has faced falling popularity after floods and scandals but has sought to bolster support through a strong nationalist stance in a border dispute. *—PTI*

Guinea heads to 1st poll after coup

CONAKRY/BANGUI, 28 DEC

Guineans and citizens of the Central African Republic (CAR) cast their votes on Sunday in pivotal elections, reflecting political transitions marked by military influence and external alliances. In Guinea, voters elected a new president for the first time since the 2021 coup, where junta leader Gen Mamadi Doumbouya is favoured to win amid a sidelined opposition and a climate of censorship. The election is seen as a crucial step for a nation blessed with mineral wealth but plagued by poverty and unemployment, especially among the youth. Meanwhile, in the CAR, incumbent President Faustin Archange Touadera is positioned to secure a third term with support from Russian mercenaries. His campaign centres on stability and economic recovery in a country grappling with decades of conflict. Facing challenges from notable opposition figures, Touadera's control over state institutions makes him a clear favourite. Both elections underscore the complex interplay of governance, security, and external influences in shaping the futures of Guinea and the CAR as they strive for improved conditions amid ongoing turmoil. *—PTI*

Myanmar votes for 1st time since military takeover

With Suu Kyi in jail, Gen Hlaing set to win

YANGON, 28 DEC

Voters went to the polls on Sunday for the initial phase of Myanmar's first general election in five years, held under the supervision of its military government while a civil war rages throughout much of the country.

Final results will not be known until after two more rounds of voting are completed later in January. It is widely expected that Min Aung Hlaing, the General who has ruled the country with an iron hand since an army takeover in 2021, will then assume the presidency.

The military government has presented the vote as a return to electoral democracy, but its bid for legitimacy is marred by bans on formerly popular opposition parties and reports that soldiers have used threats to force voters to participate.

While more than 4,800 candidates from 57 parties are competing for seats in national and regional legislatures, only six are competing nationwide with the possibility to gain political clout in Parliament.

The well-organised and funded Union Solidarity and Development Party, with its support from the military, is by far the strongest contender.

Voting is taking place in three phases, with Sunday's first round being held in 102 of Myanmar's 330 townships. The second phase will take place 11 January, and the third on 25 January.

Final results are expected to be announced by February.

The military ousted the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi in February 2021. It blocked her National League for Democracy party from serving a second term despite winning a landslide victory in the 2020 election.

The 80-year-old is currently serving a 27-year prison term, while her party is among the several that have either disbanded or have been barred from contesting.

"An election organised by a junta that continues to bomb civilians, jail political leaders, and criminalise all forms of dissent is not an election — it is a theatre of the absurd," said Tom Andrews, the UN-appointed human rights expert for Myanmar.

Amael Vier, an analyst for the Asian Network for Free Elections, noted that 73 per cent of voters in 2020 cast ballots for parties that no longer exist. *—PTI*

Voters line up to cast their ballots at a polling station in Naypyitaw, Myanmar, on Sunday *PHOTO: PTI*

The National Citizen Party is an offshoot of the the student-led SAD which spearheaded the 'July Uprising' movement last year *PHOTO: ANI*

Rift in NCP ahead of B'desh Feb polls

DHAKA, 28 DEC

An internal rift overnight gripped the student-led National Citizen Party (NCP) over its proposed alliance with the Jamaat-e-Islami ahead of the Bangladesh election in February, with 30 of its leaders issuing a joint letter opposing the plan and two ranking members resigning.

The NCP, an offshoot of the Students Against Discrimination (SAD) that spearheaded the 'July Uprising' which toppled the Sheikh Hasina-led Awami League government, emerged as a political party with interim government chief Muhammad Yunus' blessings in February.

The memorandum stated that the NCP's alliance with Jamaat conflicts with the party's ideology.

It pointed out the Jamaat's role against Bangladesh's independence and alleged collaboration in genocide and crimes during the 1971 Liberation War.

The memorandum was made public after the NCP's senior joint member-secretary, Tasnim Jara, resigned from her position on Saturday evening and announced that she would contest as an independent candidate in Dhaka.

Hours later, NCP joint convener Tajnuva Jabeen announced her resignation.

Bangladeshi press reported that NCP women leaders were against the alliance. However, signatories to the memo included men. *—PTI*

Section of interim govt is allowing violence: B'desh newspaper

DHAKA, 28 DEC

Bangladesh's newspaper Editors Council has accused a "section of the interim government" of allowing the recent spate of violence in the country after the death of Inqilab Mancha leader Sharif Osman Hadi.

Following Hadi's death, mobs set fire to newspaper offices, including Daily Star and Prothom Alo. Over half a century-old progressive cultural groups, Chayanat and Udichi Shilpi Goshthi, in the capital were also destroyed.

"We clearly know an announcement came to demolish the Prothom Alo, Daily Star and the Chhyanat one or two days before the attacks," Editors Council President Nurul Kabir said at an event of the Broadcast Journalists Centre (BJC) on Saturday.

"Yet the government did not arrest them to prevent the mayhem," Kabir, who is the editor of the New Age newspaper, said.

However, interim government's Information and Broadcast Adviser Syeda Rizwana Hasan, who was also present, said the arsonists were "our common adversaries" as they also tried to "intimidate me by hurling bombs in front of my house". *—PTI*

US lawmaker condemns Hindu man's killing

Indian-American lawmaker Ro Khanna has condemned the killing of a Hindu garment factory worker in Bangladesh, urging the global community to speak out against such "vile acts of hatred and bigotry". In a social media post on Saturday, Democrat Khanna said the lynching of Dipu Chandra Das is "horrific".

Kathmandu Mayor is PM candidate after RSP tie up

KATHMANDU, 28 DEC

- Kathmandu Metropolitan City Mayor 'Balen', who was prominent during the Gen Z protests was named as a PM candidate for the 5 March elections

Kathmandu Metropolitan City Mayor Balendra Shah, popularly known as Balen, was on Sunday named the Prime Ministerial candidate as he and Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP) inked a pact to jointly contest the 5 March Nepal elections.

The seven-point agreement, reached after overnight marathon negotiations, designates 35-year-old Balen as the parliamentary party leader and the Prime Ministerial face, while Rabi Lamichhane will continue as chairperson of the RSP, the fourth-largest party in the dissolved House of Representatives (HoR).

As per the agreement, Balen and his group will contest the elections on the RSP's election symbol 'Bell', allotted by the Election Commission.

Balen agreed to merge his team with the RSP, but the party's name, flag and election symbol will remain unchanged.

Lamichhane said the consensus should reflect the needs of the country rather than the ambitions of individual leaders.

The agreement states that the two sides have taken "ownership of the movement launched by the younger generation against corruption and bad governance" and expressed commitment to address the demands raised by Gen Z protesters. *—PTI*

The US sought favourable consideration of Starlink's licence application to provide high-speed internet services in Pakistan, particularly in rural and remote area *PHOTO: SCREENGRAB*

US trying to sell locomotives, explore minerals in Pak

ISLAMABAD, 28 DEC

The US administration has approached Pakistan to explore the sale of American locomotives and cooperation in mineral exploration, including assessment studies and agreements aimed at accelerating extraction, 'The Express Tribune' reported, citing claims made by sources in Pakistan's Government.

'The Express Tribune,' reported that sources said discussions on the matter took place during Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb's visit to Washington in October, during International Monetary Fund (IMF) annual meetings.

The Finance Minister held meetings with senior US officials, including Raymond Emory Cox, Special Assistant to the US President for International Economic Relations, and Ricky Gill, Special Assistant to the US President and Senior Director for South and Central Asia.

The sources claimed that during the meetings, Gill had requested Pakistan's support for the purchase of American locomotives in response to a tender that had been issued.

Gill also sought favourable consideration of Starlink's licence application..

Pakistan had earlier procured 55 locomotives from the US.

However, Pakistan Railways is facing liquidity problems and is relying mainly on its existing fleet. *— ANI*

En-route to US, Zelenskyy gets 1.82B aid from Canada

HALIFAX/MOSCOW, 28 DEC

- Ahead of his Sunday meeting with Trump in Mar-a-lago, Florida, Zelenskyy stopped in Cannada where he met Carney and secured the aid. He also called European leaders to strategise

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy met Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney in Halifax on Saturday during a stopover en route to Florida for talks with US President Donald Trump, where Ottawa announced that it would provide USD 1.82 billion in new economic assistance for Ukraine.

Zelenskyy arrived in Halifax a day ahead of his planned discussions with Trump. His visit came amid one of the heaviest aerial assaults on Ukraine's capital in recent weeks, which left at least two dead and disrupted electricity and heating supplies across Kyiv.

Carney said that lasting peace in Ukraine would only be possible if Russia demonstrated a genuine willingness to negotiate.

"The barbarism we saw overnight shows just how important it is that we stand with Ukraine," Carney said.

Zelenskyy also held a video conference with NATO and European Union leaders, where they discussed diplomatic strategies.

Meanwhile, Russian President Vladimir Putin said that "If Kyiv does not want peace, Russia will achieve all Special Military Operation goals by military means". *—ANI*

PHOTO: IMDB

French actress Bardot no more

PARIS, 28 DEC

Brigitte Bardot, the French 1960s sex symbol who became one of the most iconic screen sirens of the 20th century before reinventing herself as a militant animal rights activist, has died at the age of 91.

No cause of death was disclosed. Bardot had been hospitalised last month.

She rose to global fame with the 1956 film 'And God Created Woman', directed by her then-husband Roger Vadim, which scandalised audiences and made her an international star. With her blond hair, pout and uninhibited screen presence, Bardot came to symbolise a France shedding post-war conservatism. In 1969, her face was chosen as a model for Marianne, the national emblem.

After retiring from films in 1973, Bardot devoted herself to animal rights activism, though her later years were marked by multiple convictions for inciting racial hatred. *—PTI*

BABIES FREEZE TO DEATH

Chilly Gaza awaits more rains; ceasefire talks likely soon

A family eats in their tent in the Al-Shati camp, northern Gaza Strip *PHOTO: PTI*

DEIR AL-BALAH, 28 DEC

Barefoot children played on chilly sand as Gaza's thousands of displaced people prepared threadbare tents on Saturday for another round of winter rain.

Meanwhile, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is expected to visit Washington as negotiators discuss the second stage of the ceasefire that took effect on 10 October.

Some families in the town of Deir al-Balah said they had been living in tents for about two years, or for most of the war between Israel and Hamas that has devastated the territory.

Fathers braced fraying tents with old pieces of wood or inspected the ragged edges of holes torn in tarps. Inside the dim homes, daylight through tiny holes shone like stars. Mothers battled the damp, slinging clothing over poles or cord to dry in the wind between the downpours that turn paths into puddles.

"We have been living in this tent for two years. Every time it rains and the tent collapses. We try to put up new pieces of wood," said Shaima Wadi, a mother of four children who was displaced from Jabaliya.

Gaza's Health Ministry, part of the Hamas-run government, has said dozens of people, including a two-week-old infant, have died from hypothermia or weather-related collapses of war-damaged homes.

Aid organisations have called for more humanitarian aid to be allowed into the territory.

Emergency workers have warned people not to stay in damaged buildings. But with the territory rubbled, there are few places to escape the rain.

"I collect nylon, cardboard and plastic from the streets to keep them warm," said Ahmad Wadi, who burns them for warmth. *—PTI*

Pakistan opposes disarming Hamas

Pakistan said it is willing to contribute troops to an international peacekeeping force in Gaza, but only if the mandate excludes the disarmament of Hamas, a key clause in the US 20-point peace plan. Pakistan's Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar said "Pakistan will happily be a part of it (international peacekeeping force) if the mandate does not involve the disarming of Hamas. This is the responsibility of the Palestinian Authority."

CERC mulls move to ease electricity prices

NEW DELHI, 28 DEC

Power regulator CERC is considering rationalising transaction fees on power exchanges to help lower electricity costs as the sector prepares for market coupling. The move comes as CERC advances the reform, approved in July, to be rolled out in phases from January 2026, starting with the day-ahead market. Market coupling will aggregate bids across exchanges to discover a single market-clearing price, replacing multiple prices. CERC has prepared a staff paper reviewing the current fee cap of 2 paise per unit, amid rising volumes and a unified pricing mechanism. Proposals include a fixed fee of 1.5 paise per unit and 1.25 paise for term-ahead contracts. *—PTI*

PHOTO: ANI

FinMin flags vigilance lapses for bank directors

NEW DELHI, 28 DEC

The Finance Ministry has instructed public sector banks and financial institutions, including insurance firms, to immediately report vigilance-related issues concerning whole-time directors (WTDs). The Department of Financial Services (DFS) noted delays in reporting adverse information such as private complaints, court observations, CBI inputs, or other law enforcement findings, often only disclosed during Vigilance Clearance requests. Omissions, even due to missing columns in clearance forms, were flagged as a serious concern. PSUs are now required to submit comprehensive disclosures covering court or tribunal observations, internal committee findings, serious audit notes, and agency communications. Chief Vigilance Officers must ensure all vigilance clearances are fully updated, accurate, and no material is suppressed. *—PTI*

'Obesity, diabetes drugs to drive pharma growth'

NEW DELHI, 28 DEC

Obesity and diabetes treatments are set to be key growth drivers for India's pharmaceutical industry, Sun Pharma MD Kirti Ganorkar said. Glucagon-like peptide-1 (GLP-1) receptor agonists, combined with AI-enabled tools for early detection and personalised care, will enhance accessibility, affordability, and patient outcomes. India, already a global hub for generics, is emerging as a centre for weight management innovation. Dr Reddy's Chairman Satish Reddy highlighted the need for risk capital to foster pharmaceutical innovation. Icra forecasts 9-11 per cent revenue growth in FY2026, while Aster DM's Azad Moopen stressed faster approvals, tier-2/3 infrastructure, workforce skilling, and public-private collaboration. *—PTI*

NCLAT orders fresh hearing for Culver insolvency plea

NEW DELHI, 28 DEC

The National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT) has set aside an NCLT order dismissing Culver Max Entertainment's insolvency plea against Odisha-based Rechargekit Fintech. The matter has been remanded to the Cuttack bench of NCLT for a fresh hearing, with instructions to allow Culver Max to rectify defects in its application. The original NCLT order of 30 April 2024 had rejected the plea over missing Board authorisation. The NCLAT bench, comprising Justice Yogesh Khanna and Ajai Das Mehrotra, emphasised that deficiencies must be corrected before adjudication and directed NCLT to complete the exercise within two months. *—PTI*

PMO directs Coal India to list all subsidiaries

NEW DELHI, 28 DEC

The Prime Minister's Office has directed the coal ministry to map and list all subsidiaries of state-run Coal India Ltd (CIL) by 2030, sources said. The plan is expected to streamline operations and unlock value through asset monetisation in the coal major, which accounts for over 80 per cent of India's domestic coal production.

CIL operates through eight subsidiaries — Eastern Coalfields Ltd, Bharat Coking Coal Ltd (BCCL), Central Coalfields Ltd, Western Coalfields Ltd, South-Eastern Coalfields Ltd (SECL), Northern Coalfields Ltd, Mahanadi Coalfields Ltd (MCL) and Central Mine Planning & Design Institute Ltd (CMPDIL).

According to sources, BCCL and CMPDIL are set to be listed on stock exchanges by March 2026, with all preparatory work completed. Domestic and international roadshows for BCCL have concluded, and the listing process is progressing without delays. Both BCCL and CMPDIL have filed draft red herring prospectuses with SEBI for IPOs via the offer-for-sale route. BCCL's DRHP involves the sale of up to 46.57 crore equity shares by Coal India, subject to regulatory approvals and market conditions.

Coal India has also informed stock exchanges that its board has approved the listing of SECL and MCL, following a directive from the coal ministry to initiate concrete steps for their listing in the next financial year.

Coal India is targeting coal production of 875 million tonnes in the current financial year. *—PTI*

FPIs pull out record ₹1.6L cr from Indian equities in 2025

This was due to volatile rupee, global trade tensions & tariffs

NEW DELHI, 28 DEC

Foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) pulled out a record Rs 1.6 lakh crore (about USD 18 billion) from Indian equities in 2025, the worst outflow ever, as volatile currency movements, global trade tensions, potential US tariffs and stretched valuations dented risk appetite. Rising US bond yields, a stronger dollar and geopolitical uncertainties also pushed global capital towards developed markets, away from emerging economies such as India.

Data with depositories show FPIs sold equities worth Rs 1.58 lakh crore till 26 December, surpassing the previous record outflow of Rs 1.21 lakh crore in 2022. This followed a marginal inflow of Rs 427 crore in 2024, while 2023 had seen robust investments of Rs 1.71 lakh crore. In contrast to equities, FPIs invested over Rs 59,000 crore in Indian debt in 2025.

Market participants, however, expect a turnaround in 2026. Analysts said easing global conditions, including US Federal Reserve rate cuts, a softer dollar and progress on a US trade deal, could revive flows. Stronger domestic earnings growth, policy continuity and reform signals around the Union Budget are also expected to support sentiment.

Data with depositories show FPIs sold equities worth Rs 1.58 lakh crore till 26 December **PHOTO: PTI**

Analysts attributed 2025's outflows to persistently high US interest rates, elevated bond yields and phases of rupee depreciation, which eroded dollar-based returns and raised hedging costs. These pressures were compounded by geopolitical risks and intermittent concerns over energy prices and supply chains.

FPIs sold equities in eight of the 12 months, buying only in April, May, June and October. The selling was largely offset by strong domestic institutional investment, backed by rising SIP inflows from retail investors.

Debt inflows were driven by India's inclusion in global bond indices under the Fully Accessible Route, attractive yield differentials and expectations of a rate-cut cycle. *—PTI*

MACRO DATA, FPI ACTIVITY TO STEER MKTS IN YR-END WEEK

NEW DELHI, 28 DEC

Macroeconomic data releases, global cues and foreign investor activity are set to drive stock market sentiment this week, analysts said, with Indian equities expected to remain largely range-bound amid thin year-end trading. Key domestic triggers include November industrial production data, the final HSBC manufacturing PMI and auto sales figures, while the December F&O expiry may add volatility. Globally, markets will track US Federal Reserve meeting minutes, balance-sheet updates, jobless claims, and US and China PMI data, which could influence near-term risk sentiment and liquidity expectations. *—PTI*

MCAP OF 7 FIRMS DECLINES BY RS 35,439 CR

NEW DELHI, 28 DEC

The combined market capitalisation of seven of the top-10 most valued Indian companies declined by Rs 35,439.36 crore in a holiday-shortened last week, with State Bank of India (SBI) emerging as the biggest laggard amid a muted trend in equities. During the week, the BSE benchmark Sensex edged up 112.09 points, or 0.13 per cent.

From the top-10 list, Reliance Industries, Tata Consultancy Services (TCS), ICICI Bank, SBI, Bajaj Finance, Larsen & Toubro (L&T) and Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC) saw erosion in their valuations, while HDFC Bank, Bharti Airtel and Infosys posted gains.

SBI's market capitalisation dropped the most, falling by Rs 12,692.1 crore to Rs 8,92,046.88 crore. Reliance Industries lost Rs 8,254.81 crore to Rs 21,09,712.48 crore, while Bajaj Finance shed Rs 5,102.43 crore to Rs 6,22,124.01 crore. L&T's valuation declined by Rs 4,002.94 crore, ICICI Bank's by Rs 2,571.39 crore, LIC's by Rs 1,802.62 crore and TCS's by Rs 1,013.07 crore. On the positive side, HDFC Bank added Rs 10,126.81 crore, Infosys gained Rs 6,626.62 crore and Bharti Airtel rose Rs 5,359.98 crore.

Reliance Industries remained the country's most valued firm, followed by HDFC Bank and Bharti Airtel. *—PTI*

'CAN'T RELY ON ALGORITHM'

Chairperson, Adani Foundation
In the August Presence of
Shri SHARADCHANDRA PAWAR
Hon. Member of Parliament (Rajya Sabha)
Founder & President, Vidya Pratishthan, Baramati

NCP (SP) Sharad PawaR with Adani Group Chairman Gautam Adani and NCP head Ajit Pawar in Baramati **PHOTO: GAUTHAM ADANI**

Adani inaugurates AI centre of excellence in Baramati

BARAMATI, 28 DEC

Industrialist Gautam Adani on Sunday inaugurated the Sharadchandra Pawar Centre of Excellence in Artificial Intelligence at Baramati, Maharashtra, and emphasised India's need to develop sovereign AI capabilities to safeguard jobs, data and national interests. The centre, funded by the Adani Group, is established under Vidya Pratishthan, the educational institute governed by the Pawar family. NCP chief Sharad Pawar, Baramati MP Supriya Sule, Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar, Rajya Sabha MP Sunetra Pawar, MLA Rohit Pawar, and Vidya Pratishthan treasurer Yugendra Pawar attended.

Addressing students, researchers and policymakers, Adani warned against over-reliance on foreign technologies. "Growth without sovereignty creates dependence, and progress without control creates risk. A nation of 1.4 billion people cannot place its jobs, data, culture and collective intelligence at the mercy of foreign algorithms," he said. The Adani Group also signed an MoU with Vidya Pratishthan to deepen collaboration in AI research, engineering and execution, with investments in AI infrastructure, data centres and green energy critical to India's technological sovereignty.

Rs 1.8L cr in defence

Separately, Adani Group plans to invest Rs 1.8 lakh crore in defence manufacturing in 2026 to strengthen indigenous military capabilities. The focus will be on unmanned and autonomous systems, advanced guided weapons, sensors, electronics and AI-enabled multi-domain operations, sources said. *—Agencies*

Forex reserves rise $4.37 billion to a near record high

NEW DELHI, 28 DEC

India's foreign exchange reserves rose by USD 4.37 billion in the week ended December 19 to USD 693.32 billion, driven by a sharp increase in gold reserves and higher foreign currency assets, according to the Reserve Bank of India's latest Weekly Statistical Supplement.

The forex kitty has been on an upward trajectory in recent weeks and is now close to its all-time high of USD 704.89 billion, recorded in September 2024. For the reported week, foreign currency assets (FCA), the largest component of the reserves, increased by USD 1.64 billion to USD 559.43 billion.

Gold reserves rose significantly by USD 2.62 billion to USD 110.37 billion, reflecting a strong uptrend in gold prices amid heightened global uncertainties and sustained investment demand for the safe-haven asset.

Following its latest monetary policy review, the RBI said India's foreign exchange reserves are sufficient to cover more than 11 months of merchandise imports, underlining the resilience of the external sector. The central bank has expressed confidence in its ability to comfortably meet the country's financing. *—PTI*

Lockheed Martin pitches C-130Js as 'best' choice for IAF

MARIETTA, 28 DEC

As India prepares to procure up to 80 medium military transport aircraft, US aerospace major Lockheed Martin has pitched its C-130J Super Hercules as the "best" option for the Indian Air Force (IAF) and announced plans to establish a major production hub in India if selected.

Lockheed Martin officials said the facility would be the first global C-130J production hub outside the US and could position India as an export base. The IAF currently operates 12 C-130Js, while other Quad nations — the US, Australia and Japan — also fly the aircraft. An expanded Indian fleet would strengthen tactical airlift interoperability within the Quad, the company said.

India issued an RFI in 2022 to replace ageing AN-32 and IL-76 aircraft. The multi-billion-dollar MTA programme, involving around 80 planes, is expected to be cleared by the Defence Acquisition Council shortly. Brazil's Embraer KC-390 and Airbus A400M are also in contention.

Lockheed Martin said over 560 C-130Js have been delivered globally, accumulating more than three million flight hours across 23 countries. *—PTI*

Rolls-Royce plans major defence India expansion

NEW DELHI, 28 DEC

British aero-engine maker Rolls-Royce plans a major expansion in India, eyeing opportunities across jet engines, naval propulsion, land systems and advanced engineering, and is looking to make India its third "home market" outside the UK, a senior executive said.

Sashi Mukundan, executive vice president of Rolls-Royce India, told PTI the company is planning a significant investment and sees developing a next-generation aero engine in India as a priority, particularly to power the indigenous Advanced Medium Combat Aircraft (AMCA). Rolls-Royce currently considers the US and Germany as its home markets outside the UK.

Mukundan said all design work for the AMCA engine could be carried out in India, with technology transfer and joint ownership of new intellectual property, giving India strategic control. He added that such an engine could also support electric and hybrid naval propulsion, as Rolls-Royce is among the few global players capable of adapting aero engines for marine use.

The company is also set to firm up two MoUs with Indian defence PSUs for engines for Arjun tanks and future combat vehicles. Rolls-Royce's expansion plans, Mukundan said. *—PTI*

BATS FOR FIRM MADE CONTENT

User posts do not boost brand engagement: Study

NEW DELHI, 28 DEC

A new study by the Goa Institute of Management (GIM), in collaboration with Goa University, finds that user-generated social media content (UGC) does not directly impact brand engagement, while high-quality firm-generated content (FGC) significantly boosts engagement and builds brand equity.

Published in the Journal of Promotion Management, the research analysed content across Facebook, Instagram and YouTube, using the Elaboration Likelihood Model and Social Identity Theory to understand how consumers process brand content. The study found that both FGC and UGC influence customer-based brand equity, but only FGC's credibility enhances it. Brand equity acts as a full mediator, meaning content strengthens equity first, which then drives engagement.

"The findings highlight that professional, credible content still wins consumers' minds and hearts," said Saswat Barpanda, Associate Professor at GIM. "Brands must focus on trust and identity before expecting meaningful engagement."

The study shows that visually engaging content, such as tutorials or product explainers, helps brands create emotional connections and meaningful interactions with audiences. Its insights apply across sectors including FMCG, tourism, retail and consumer services, providing guidance for strategic digital campaigns.

"By prioritising high-quality firm-generated content, brands can convert followers into loyal advocates, enhancing campaign performance and return on investment," added Nandakumar Mekoth, Professor at GIM. *—PTI*

Andhra's new policy to make Amaravati quantum hub

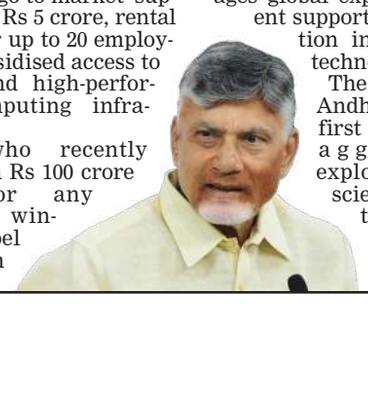
AMARAVATI, 28 DEC

Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu on Sunday launched the state's landmark Quantum Computing Policy, aiming to position Andhra Pradesh as a global hub for advanced technologies through the Quantum Valley in Amaravati.

The policy offers startups grants of up to Rs 30 lakh, seed funding of Rs 1 crore, and 75 per cent reimbursement for patent filing. Companies can also access go-to-market support of up to Rs 5 crore, rental subsidies for up to 20 employees, and subsidised access to quantum and high-performance computing infrastructure.

Naidu, who recently announced a Rs 100 crore reward for any Andhraite winning a Nobel Prize in quantum computing, said the initiative will create a world-class ecosystem combining talent, research, and industry. The policy's three-phase strategy will build a talent pipeline through education and teacher training, develop testing and benchmarking infrastructure, and incubate industry pilots.

Startups will receive early funding and operational support to move from proof-of-concept to market-ready solutions. The scheme also encourages global exposure via patent support and participation in international technology events.



The policy makes Andhra Pradesh the first Indian state to aggressively explore quantum science and deep-tech entrepreneurship. *—PTI*

QUOTE of THE DAY

"That (160kmph) means more to me than any wicket I've taken. Of course, the team comes first - to win the (2003) World Cup, the 16 straight Test wins, that's the pinnacle; that's why you play the game

—BRETT LEE,
Former bowler on Australian Cricket's Hall of Fame honour

Humpy in joint lead at Doha World Chess C'ship

Gukesh, Erigaisi well-placed as Carlsen suffers rare loss

DOHA, 28 DEC

Reigning champion Koneru Humpy displayed composure and tenacity to remain in joint lead in the women's section, while Indian star players D. Gukesh and Arjun Erigaisi remained in the hunt in the 'Open' category on Day 2 of the FIDE World Rapid Championships here.

With three more rounds to go in the women's section on Sunday, Humpy shared the lead with China's Zhu Jiner on 6.5 points out of a maximum eight.

Ten players with six points each, including India's Dronavalli Harika, are just behind them.

However, it was world champion Gukesh's fighting spirit that stood out on Saturday, despite the Indian ace claiming before the start that he didn't have any expectations.

Gukesh and Erigaisi were placed comfortably at 6.5 points in a cluster of 13 players after nine rounds, with just a point separating the Indian duo from Vladislav Artemiev and Hans Niemann (7.5 points each).

Starting with two draws, against Dutch GM Anish Giri and Alexey Sarana, Gukesh prevailed over Spain's David Anton in a Round 8 game.

Koneru Humpy, Arjun Erigaisi and D Gukesh PHOTO: ANI

But he was decimated by Nodirbek Abdusattorov in the King's Indian attack, the Indian's only defeat so far.

However, it was 27-year-old Russian GM Artemiev who held centre stage after inflicting a rare defeat on world No. 1 and five-time world rapid champion Carlsen, and Erigaisi.

Joint leaders Artemiev and Niemann are chased by four players half a point behind, Carlsen, Alexey Sarana, Yagiz Erdogmus and Nodirbek Abdusattorov.

Giant-killer Artemiev was in great form as he opened with a victory as black against Erigaisi.

In Round 7, Artemiev defeated Carlsen in a game where the world's top-rated player made a grave mistake on move 15, which cost him dearly. This win put Artemiev at 6.5 points, a point ahead of the field. —PTI

GAMBHIR UNDER SCANNER

BCCI denies approaching Laxman for Test coach gig

NEW DELHI, 28 DEC

The Secretary of the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI), Devajit Saikia, denied speculations of Indian batting legend VVS Laxman being approached to be the men's team's next Test coach as "factually incorrect and baseless," saying that the Board has not taken any steps regarding any change of the leadership group in the longest format of the game.

The media reports of Laxman being approached to become India's next Test coach has been doing the rounds. The news comes just a few weeks after India suffered a 0-2 Test whitewash to South Africa at home under Gautam Gambhir, their second whitewash in back-to-back years following a humiliating 0-3 loss to New Zealand last year under the same coach, which marked India's first Test series loss at home since 12 years and starting of crumbling of India's great Test empire, guarded well by leaders like MS Dhoni, Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma for over a decade.

The NZ whitewash cost India a place in the ICC World Test Championship 2025 final, and the latest setback to the Proteas could also end up costing them a berth in the marquee one-off Test championship clash, depending on how further results go.

PHOTO: ANI

- The media reports of Laxman being approached to become India's next Test coach has been doing the rounds.

Speaking to ANI, Saikia said, "This is totally incorrect. There is no truth in it. People can think what they want, but the BCCI has not taken any steps. There is no truth in it, and I cannot say anything except that this is baseless." —ANI

MI Emirates secure top-two ILT20 finish

ABU DHABI, 28 DEC

Kieron Pollard's late onslaught, backed by a superb spin effort, powered MI Emirates to an eight-wicket win over Dubai Capitals and confirmed a top-two finish in the ILT20. After choosing to field, MI Emirates restricted the Capitals to 122/8, with Allah Ghazanfar claiming 3/28 and Shakib Al Hasan bowling an economical spell of 1/11. Early wickets kept the pressure firmly on the batting side. In reply, MI Emirates made a brisk start before Pollard took control. —PTI

Former England cricketer Hugh Morris dies at 62

CARDIFF, 28 DEC

Hugh Morris, the former England cricketer and ex-chief executive of the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB), has died aged 62, Glamorgan said on Sunday. The county said Morris had endured an "extremely difficult" final few years after being diagnosed with bowel cancer. An opening batter, Morris played three Tests for England and captained Glamorgan, helping the side win the County Championship in 1997, his final season. He scored 19,785 first-class runs at an average of 40.29. After retiring, Morris spent 16 years at the ECB, including a successful spell as chief executive. He later returned to Glamorgan as CEO, helping stabilise the club financially. —ANI

BOXING DAY PITCH FIASCO

MCG curator shocked over 2-day Test finish

MELBOURNE, 28 DEC

Melbourne Cricket Ground head curator Matthew Page confessed he was "in a state of shock" after 20 wickets fell on the opening day of the Boxing Day Test, admitting that the pitch heavily favoured bowlers.

Page opted to leave 10 mm of grass, up from 7 mm last year when Australia beat India. But the decision backfired as 36 wickets fell in just 142 overs across six sessions and England went on to defeat Australia by four wickets late on day two on Saturday.

"I was in a state of shock after the first day," Page told the press at the MCG on Sunday.

"We're obviously disappointed it's gone two days. We produced a Test that was captivating, but it hasn't gone long enough. We'll learn from that and make sure we get it right next year."

"I've never been involved in a Test match like it and hopefully I'm not involved in a Test match like it again."

Despite winning the match, England's first Test win in Australia since 2011, Captain Ben Stokes strongly criticised the overwhelmingly bowler-friendly pitch, saying such conditions elsewhere in the world would unleash "hell."

"We know this hasn't gone as we planned. We're trying to balance that contest between bat and ball throughout to provide that captivating Test for all," Page said.

Batters from both sides struggled with significant sideways movement generated by the wobble seam. Page said the extra grass was left on the pitch due to the hot weather. —PTI

PHOTO: ANI

Abhishek's Sunday sixes: Inside out hits on tough net pitch

JAIPUR, 28 DEC

Punjab skipper Abhishek Sharma on Sunday at Anantam Cricket Ground showcased his extraordinary batting prowess during a net session, asking teammate Gaurav Chaudhary about an imaginary field placement: "Field kya hai?" to which Chaudhary responded, "Mid-off single saving ke liye rakkha hai," indicating a fielder aimed at preventing singles.

Over the course of the session, the world's No. 1 T20 batsman launched at least 45 sixes against spinners on a challenging pitch that offered considerable turn. Despite a request for a light roller, the bowlers tested Sharma with deliveries that varied from surprising jumps to alarming lows. Yet, he expertly danced down the track, lofting balls inside-out over extra cover, with some landing in the adjacent high-rise residential building.

PHOTO: INSTAGRAM

Coach Sandeep Sharma jokingly remarked, "Tu apni century poori karan layi extra cover de upar hi chakke maarna chaunda ae," implying that Abhishek seemed determined to finish his century with sixes. Sharma did encounter challenges with slightly shorter lengths but adapted quickly, jokingly falling into a trap created by a red fielding net at short extra cover.

As the session concluded, it was evident that Sharma's aggressive approach reflected his mindset and the team's philosophy, demonstrating control even amidst occasional dismissals during his hour-long batting display. —PTI

Pak recalls Shadab for T20I series against SL

LAHORE, 28 DEC

Pakistan has announced the squad for the upcoming T20I series against Sri Lanka, recalling all-rounder Shadab Khan after his recovery from shoulder surgery. The three-match series kicks off on 7 January 2026, but top players Babar Azam and Shaheen Afridi will remain engaged in the Big Bash League in Australia.

Shadab's return follows a successful stint in the BBL, where he outperformed his compatriots. Despite the option for other players in the league to return for national duties, the Pakistan Cricket Board opted to honour commitments to Cricket Australia, allowing Babar, Shaheen, Haris Rauf, Hasan Ali, and Muhammad Rizwan to continue playing in Australia.

The selection includes uncapped batter Khawaja Nafay and Abdul Samad, although Nafay's inclusion has drawn questions due to his limited domestic performance. The senior team members expressed the significance of participating in the Sri Lanka series, viewing it as a vital opportunity to acclimatise to the conditions preceding the T20 World Cup early next year.

The complete squad features Salman Ali Agha (captain), Abdul Samad, Saim Ayub, Sahabzada Farhan, Fakhar Zaman, Shadab Khan, Faheem Ashraf, Muhammad Nawaz, Abrar Ahmed, Usman Tariq, Usman Khan, Khawaja Nafay, Naseem Shah, Salman Mirza, and Muhammad Waseem junior. —PTI

Yuvraj Sandhu clinches TATA Open, sets PGTI season record

JAMSHEDPUR, 28 DEC

Yuvraj Sandhu capped a stellar year by winning the TATA Open 2025 to claim a record seventh title in a single Professional Golf Tour of India (PGTI) season. The 28-year-old Chandigarh golfer carded a final-round six-under 65 to finish at 20-under 264, sealing victory with a decisive birdie on the final hole at the Beldih and Golmuri Golf Courses.

Sandhu edged out Shubham Jaglan, who shot a bogey-free

66 to finish one stroke behind at 19-under. Khalin Joshi and Veer Ahlawat were tied third at 14-under.

Already assured of the PGTI Order of Merit title, Sandhu's win earned him Rs 30 lakh, taking his season earnings to a record Rs 1.91 crore. He has also secured a DP World Tour card for 2026.

Sandhu won seven titles and posted seven other top-10 finishes this season. Sri Lanka's N Thangaraja finished second on the PGTI Rankings.

Rookie Manoj S won Emerging Player of the Year honours. — PTI

INDIAN BADMINTON IN 2025

Sen, Satwik-Chirag deliver highs amid season low

NEW DELHI, 28 DEC

The year 2025 proved challenging for Indian badminton, with injuries and inconsistent performances affecting many top players. Yet Lakshya Sen's title win, a World Championships medal from Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty, and promising progress from the next generation offered some optimism in a transitional season. Often, the year felt more like one of reassessment than consolidation, as fitness setbacks disrupted preparation and rhythm for established stars.

Sen's triumph at the Australian Open marked a return to form following his fourth-place finish at the Paris Olympics. It was his first Super 500 crown since the 2023 Canada Open and his first overall title since winning the Syed Modi International Super 300 in December 2024. He also came close to another trophy, finishing runner-up at the Hong Kong Open.

Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty PHOTO: ANI FILE

In an otherwise stop-start year, Satwik and Chirag reaffirmed their status as India's premier doubles pair despite battling injury and illness early in the season. The duo claimed a bronze medal at the World Championships in Paris, reached the finals of the Hong Kong Open and China Masters, and ended the year on a positive note by becoming the first Indian men's doubles pair to reach the knockout stage of the BWF World Tour Finals. —PTI

IN BAHRAIN TOURNAMENT

Pak bans Kabbadi star playing for India

KARACHI, 28 DEC

A well-known Pakistan international kabaddi player, Ubaidullah Rajput, has been banned indefinitely by the national federation after he appeared for an Indian team in a private tournament in Bahrain earlier this month.

The Pakistan Kabaddi Federation (PKF) imposed the ban following an emergency meeting on Saturday, finding Rajput guilty of travelling abroad to play in the tournament without obtaining a mandatory no-objection certificate (NOC) from the federation or other relevant authorities.

PKF secretary Rana Sarwar said Rajput has the right to appeal before a disciplinary committee.

Sarwar said the federation took serious note of the fact that Rajput not only travelled overseas without an NOC but also represented a team from India, wore its jersey and, at one point, wrapped the Indian flag around his shoulders after winning a match.

"But he (Rajput) has claimed it was a total misunderstanding and he was never told the team he would play for in the private tournament would be an Indian side. But he is still guilty of flouting NOC rules," Sarwar said.

Rajput landed in trouble after videos and photographs of him wearing an Indian jersey and waving the Indian flag during the GCC Cup went viral on social media.

Sarwar added that other players have also been banned and fined for participating in the event without obtaining NOCs.

Rajput had earlier issued an apology, stating that he was invited to play in the tournament in Bahrain and was included in a private team.

"But I didn't know until later they had named the side Indian team and I told the organizers to not use names of India and Pakistan. In private competitions in the past, Indian and Pakistan players have played together for a private team but never under the names of India or Pakistan," he had said.

"I found out later that I was misrepresented as playing for the Indian team which I can't think of doing after the conflict." — PTI

Junior Men Hockey Team cap off a successful 2025

NEW DELHI, 28 DEC

The Indian Junior Men's Hockey Team ended 2025 on a high, securing two major international medals and building momentum ahead of the FIH Hockey Men's Junior World Cup Tamil Nadu 2025.

Under the guidance of coach PR Sreejesh, the team underwent a series of intensive national training camps, which helped shape a confident and well-prepared squad. India's competitive season began at the Four Nations Tournament in June, facing Germany, Spain and Australia. The side finished third after a crucial 2-1 victory over Australia, gaining valuable experience and clarity in combinations.

In October, India carried this form into the Sultan of Johor Cup, claiming the silver medal.

The Team won two major international medals PHOTO: ANI

Wins against Great Britain, New Zealand and Malaysia, along with a 3-3 draw against Pakistan, saw them reach the final, where they narrowly lost 1-2 to Australia.

At the Junior World Cup on home soil, India dominated the pool stage with wins over Chile, Oman and Switzerland. A thrilling quarter-final shootout win over Belgium, powered by goalkeeper Prince Deep Singh's two saves, set up a semi-final clash with Germany, which they lost 1-5.

India recovered to defeat Argentina 4-2 in the bronze-medal playoff. —PTI